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The Chain

A Novel

Charles Hanson Towne

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THE CHAIN

A NOVEL

BY

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1922

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HARVARD
COLLEGE
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Charles Hanson Towne

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To

SISTER AND TADDY

WITH AFFECTION

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"In the fell clutch of Circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Beneath the bludgeonings of Chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed."

W. E. HENLEY.

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THE CHAIN

PART I

THE OUTSKIRTS

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CHAPTER I

I

THERE is a chain around us all. The links are forged by some high god before we come into this world, and we cannot escape from our gaoler, whose name is Circumstance. Sometimes we compromise with him, and the chain lengthens for a while—until the inevitable hour comes when we must compromise again.

However we may deny it, we are never quite free. The happiest are those who realize their bondage, and are not afraid of Destiny.

John Darrow was one of these.

II

It was on a rainy Sunday morning in March, some twenty or more years ago, beneath a gray, sodden sky, that he arrived at the Grand Central Station in New York. As the train pulled into the gloomy yard, and he sat back on the plush seat of a berth that had been made up, it seemed to him that he had never felt so miserably unhappy, so heartsick and homesick. Those shabby houses they had passed all the way down from Harlem—could this be the New York of his dreams? Those side streets of which he caught glimpses, wet with the rain, forlorn in their early-morning nakedness—how ugly and uninspiring they were! If this was the metro-

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polis, why did people tell of the wonder and magnificence of it? But of course all New York could not be like this flashing view that came to him. There were fine thoroughfares—Fifth Avenue, for instance, and Riverside Drive; and of course there was Central Park. And the World Building, with its golden dome that was unbelievably high, outstripping all the other buildings near it—soon he would see these sights, and probably write enthusiastic letters home.

He had come prepared to fall under the spell of New York—everyone did. That was the reason his heart sank when he got his first impression of the vast city, stretching out in all directions like a huge scrambled egg.

New York would grow upon him; soon he would be an integral part of this throbbing, pulsing mass, one of the serious workers within this honeycomb; and in some distant day perhaps he too, would be known, as others were known. Already one magazine had accepted three poems he had written. In that editoral office, somewhere down under Brooklyn Bridge, he had been recognized and he had had personal letters from the woman editor, with promises of payment upon publication. This was but a beginning, of course, in his step upward. There were great worlds to conquer; but at twenty-two it does not seem a colossal task to gird on one's armor and get into the fight. He had all the arrogance of youth, and a curious belief in himself and his talents, though cursed with a sensitiveness that made him shrink from calling upon strangers, or even upon people to whom he had letters of introduction. When he was alone, as he was now, he could meditate upon all the wild things he would do, all the important men and women he would seek out; he even planned his opening sentences. But when he actually started out to meet them he knew his heart would fail him, and it would take him hours—days,

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perhaps to make up his mind to move in their direction.

In his home town, in the northern part of the state, it was different. One knew everybody else in Stockton. There were no secret passages to friendship; no devious roads to the consummation of some business deal. Everything was direct, straightforward, and there was much slapping upon the back, and frequent warm grips of the hand. Everybody was on an equal footing, and the evening "parties" were democratic gatherings that made America the great country it was, with the minister and the blacksmith sitting on neighboring chairs over the village washerwoman's coffee, talking politics and religion.

John knew very well that such evenings never occurred in the big cities—certainly not in New York. He was aware that one could live for years next to somebody else, and never know his name. He always heard of such coldness and aloofness with a smile in the corner of his mouth. It did not seem possible. The very proximity of people should cause them to know one another better; and he found it hard to understand a social order which reared barriers at once and refused to recognize the ordinary courtesies of life. The poet in him rebelled at so unimaginative a code; and though John did not know it at the time, he had that genius for friendship which is above rubies. He could talk with a Pullman porter or a multi-millionaire train companion with equal ease and honesty. His blue eyes gave proof of the integrity of his heart; and his wide, open mouth indicated his generosity. His body was too thin; he had never been overstrong; but behind him were sturdy English and Scotch ancestors whose decent blood had tided him over two serious illnesses. It was a saying in the family that a Darrow grew stronger as he grew older; and it was true. From a puny lad of ten, John had emerged into his 'teens a trifle more robust. He studied too hard, and eyestrain

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gave him headaches; but he would never forego his books for the sake of a game of ball with boys his own age. At sixteen he began to get more color into his face; but the cheek-bones were still too high and prominent, and his mother, who loved to fret and would have died if she couldn't, worried over his pallor, and drove him out of the house for long walks and rides through the valley, and up a certain mountain road that commanded a view of their little town.

He loved this mountain road. Often he went there on summer mornings, alone, and sat for hours looking down on the tiny village, and far off where he knew a city gleamed in the sun. An old stone house occupied by the village printer and publisher stood on the side of the road, and from its tower one could see for miles. Some day, when he was rich enough, John wanted this place for his own. What a study he would make of the south room, with long rows of built-in book-cases, and a monstrous fireplace before which he would dream and smoke his pipe. But such a life of contemplation lay in the nebulous future. There were battles to be fought before he could reach such a sanctuary. Yet it did no harm to think of it as his final refuge from the world.

It was those early years which gave John the comprehension of the beauty of the world. He would look down on the slumbering village with an ache in his heart. This green world, so beautiful—why was he in it? What was the meaning of it all? Whence had he come, and whither would he go? The old, eternal questions that youth asks, if it has a spark of the divine fire. He always saw over and beyond the natural beauty of the earth. And just as, almost clairvoyantly, he could not help visualizing Autumn even though it was May, he forever saw, in the faces of young girls, the inevitable disintegration of their loveliness. This knowledge, this almost

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second-sight, did not make him sad. He simply felt that certain things had to be; and the tragic undertones of life were forever murmuring in his heart, making him aware of the solemnity of things.

Yet he was not morose. On the contrary, he had a weakness for laughter, that made him a delightful companion. He kept his serious moments for himself. There had never been a time when he had not wished to express himself on paper; and very early he began a diary in which he poured out all the pent-up emotions he experienced, as though the sheets of paper were friends to whom he whispered everything. When the rhythm of life drove him necessarily, with his nature, to the rhythm of words, he was exultant—but a little ashamed. The practical man in him feared the dominance of the poet; and though he knew, from his abundant reading, that poets were far from epicene creatures, he nevertheless tried to strangle his lyrical outbursts, as a woman might resent a deformed child. But the flood of words continued to gush forth; and John's passionate love of nature in all her manifestations continued to drive him to pen and paper. But he never showed anyone what he had written. In the back of his brain the little feeling of shame persisted.

III

He would never forget the day when his sister, three years his senior, a hoyden if there ever was one, found a stray poem in his handwriting and brought it triumphantly forth when the family sat down to dinner one day. "Look here! John's a poet!" she cried, in her raucous voice which always grated on her brother's sensitive nerves. He feared Ethel, who was given to tantrums and scathing remarks. She had a vivid personality,

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and loved to leap from behind doors on dark stairways, to creep up on the veranda when one was sitting in peace, and with shrieks of laughter frighten one to death. She could never be made, by a mother not too strict a disciplinarian, to study her music lessons. She would far rather romp with the boys of the village, go fishing with them, and even in bathing, though of course she had been forbidden to do any such unmaidenly thing.

The discovery that John secretly wrote verse was the most exciting and delightful event. It lent spice to an uneventful week. She waited until the whole family had come in. Their father was carving the roast beef, and their mother, pallid and nervous, was pouring the tea. Aunt Em, with her inevitable crochet work, tripped in like a little bird, with greetings that sounded like chirps. Margaret, the eldest, followed, and seriously sat down by Ethel.

"Listen!" cried the hoyden, "to something I found on the stairs:

"'My soul goes blundering to the gates of God,
I know the path that wanders toward the stars—'"

John, white with rage and confusion at his exposure, was sitting on the opposite side of the table. As he recognized his own lines, he could not control himself. He rose. His sister was holding the paper from her face with one hand, and gesticulating with the other; and her voice took on an artificiality of tone, comic mimicry of a lady from a Lyceum Bureau who had recently recited at one of the churches in Stockton.

"Stop that!" was all John said, through compressed lips.

"I'll do no such thing!" Ethel cried, not even deigning to look at him. And she started to go on:

"'Yea, when the night——'"

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But in a jiffy—she never quite knew how he reached her—John had torn the sheet from her, and, hurt as only youth can be hurt, stalked from the room. He felt that life had changed for him in that instant—as indeed it had; for henceforth there could be no denial of the fact that he quietly wrote verse; and there would be a dreadful family interest in his work, and incessant questioning, a perpetual inquisitiveness that would almost crush his sensitive soul.

He ate no dinner that day. Instead, he marched to the barn and got his wheel. For hours he rode down the valley, his heart pounding, not with the exercise, but with the excitement brought on by Ethel's cruel exposition. Thank God he was going to college soon. He could get away from Ethel, and the smiles of the others—for he knew they would laugh at him too. All except his mother.

IV

It was strange that this incident stood out in his mind on this drizzling Sunday morning. Perhaps it came back to him because he had been thinking of his puerile success with the *Ladies' Banner* somewhere down under the Bridge; and how those first efforts had finally led to his getting into print.

There were no "red caps" in those days. Even if there had been, John would not have hailed one; for he thought it more manly to carry his own grip. He started through the dingy station, conscious of the hundreds of other shuffling feet around him, and very homesick and lonely in the crowd. He must get breakfast first. He did not know what a good meal he could have had at the Grand Union Hotel, just across the street, in the grill-room filled with old photographs and theatre programs. His alert

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eye caught sight of the counter in the centre of the waiting-room. Here he fortified himself with coffee that was quite different from that he got at home; and he could not bring himself to finish the eggs the waitress served him. The pile of dry doughnuts on the counter amused, rather than offended him. In comparison with Aunt Em's fresh, light "fried cakes" they looked pitifully anæmic. People constantly brushed by and around him, and, unused to vast crowds, a sense of confusion came over him. He had taken off his hat, as a matter of course, and placed it on the stool next to him. The place filled up, as he was trying to gulp down his coffee, when a gruff, blustering man of middle age came and took the hat from the stool and deliberately placed it upon the counter, without a word. Then he ascended the stool and grabbed one of the sticky menus that were scattered about. John merely looked at him; but the stranger was immediately absorbed in the question of food. Two or three people around them had seen the incident, and smiled a bit. Then John noticed for the first time that no one else had removed his hat from his head; and, a little ashamed of his up-State, greenhorn ways, he put his own back where it evidently, in this rude city, belonged. He felt humiliated that within his first ten minutes in New York he had been made something of a fool; and his sense of humor told him that he must be on his guard.

He had no friends in New York—unless Mrs. Morgan, who edited the *Ladies' Banner,* could be called a friend. But he had the address of a family in Brooklyn, where he knew he would be taken in as a lodger. Miss Lucy Shaw, who had studied music one season in the Brooklyn Conservatory, had given him a letter to Mrs. Deeley, who lived on South Portland Avenue. She had stopped with them for a whole winter two years ago,

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and the rates were well within her frugal means. It had not occurred to John that Brooklyn would be a bad place to live. Miss Lucy had liked it. "The clatter of New York got on my nerves, and it will on yours too, John," she had told him. "Besides, it's cheaper over there, and it's fun crossing the Bridge now and then."

John had explicit directions for reaching South Portland Avenue. He was to take the Third Avenue elevated road at Forty-second street, the moment he emerged from the station— "and be sure you take a City Hall train" was written in Miss Lucy's spencerian hand on the slip of paper he carried. Then he must cross the wonderful Brooklyn Bridge, on a trolley marked "Putnam Avenue." The conductor would tell him when he reached his corner. It seemed complicated to the country boy. It wouldn't have been so bad if it had not been raining. There was an odor of damp leather around him, and little pools of rain where people had allowed their umbrellas to stand in the station while they waited about. He liked people—he always had and would; but everyone looked so tired, so unclean. He was used to fresh complexions, rosy cheeks and clear eyes. It was as though he had come suddenly into a foreign country, so alien were most of the folk around him. He heard a little German and Swedish as he made his way to the street, and plenty of Italian. Men expectorated on the floor, but no one seemed to mind; he saw hideous pools of tobacco juice on the wet, creaking floor, and innumerable pieces of newspaper scattered around, shuffled under foot forever in the dingy station.

He was glad to get out upon Forty-second street. Here a line of men stood, calling something that he could not possibly understand, and waving to everyone who emerged from the station. "Cabcabcabcabcabcab!" they cried, like so many jackdaws; and in their long, unkempt coats

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they looked like the chorus of bandits he had once seen in an itinerant comic-opera troupe.

Never had he seen such a busy street, though it was but eight o'clock on a Sunday morning. The cars jangled by, newsboys were calling, bootblacks were crying out, "Shine, boss!" and both men and women were running after crosstown and Madison Avenue cars. He had no idea which way he should turn.

A few early bicyclists meandered by, not at all confounded by the sloppy streets. They found their way expertly in and out of the traffic; and John watched them with an intense admiration, for he had never ridden his wheel in a city, and he marveled at these scientific and blasé riders who seemed so at home in this mad whirligig. Yet had he been wiser, he would have known that this was nothing to them. It was an off morning; the traffic was thin indeed. Later he was to see thousands upon thousands of them at Columbus Circle and over near Prospect Park, speeding along like trick wheelmen in vaudeville—and he was to be among them!

He was so intent upon watching the wheelmen that for a moment he did not hear a cry from the direction of Lexington avenue. It was a shrill feminine voice calling "Police! Police!" He heard it at last, and turned to see a rather good-looking young woman racing toward him, her eyes big with excitement. Ahead of her was a rough-looking fellow, his collar turned up, his trousers and shoes shabby, and that look of toughness so characteristic of a certain New York type. At first these were the only people running; but in another instant a crowd sprang miraculously from walls and doorways and even pavements; came in legions out of the air and joined in the chase. Someone cried, "Stop, thief!" and the words were a signal for recruits. In the swift moment that followed, John was conscious of hundreds of men and boys joining

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in the pursuit. There was no policeman anywhere to be seen.

John stood perfectly still at this manifestation of sudden life in a big city—this overwhelming revelation of how many people could run or walk through a street, quickly and bewilderingly. Unused to the sight of such a teeming mass of humanity, he was also a little terrified at the loud and sinister cries that awoke the neighborhood.

Almost in front of him the thief was pounced upon by a particularly stalwart youth whose lips set when he grasped him by the coat collar, and whirled him about so that he faced him.

"You —— rascal!" John heard him say; and even in the excitement of the moment, the oath and the event caused him to think of quiet little Stockton's passive Sunday morning. But this might happen here, any time!

He heard a terrific blow; and he saw the fiery multitude encircle the wretch who was now a captured animal, trapped, helpless. Everyone had forgotten the girl whose purse had been stolen—and thrown away by the crafty ruffian. She was only one of the chorus now who piled about the central pivot of this scene.

It looked for one blinding instant as if the crowd would tear legs and arms from their unhappy victim. Already his clothes were being pulled from his back, and his hat had long since disappeared. His damp, dank hair fell over his hard eyes. He looked like a stricken lion, and when the blood began to gush from his forehead and cheeks, John could not help feeling a bit sorry for him. He wouldn't have wanted to see a rat torn apart, much less any human being, no matter what he had done. But the crowd was eager to act; and John wondered what would have happened if two bluecoats had not mysteriously appeared from nowhere and pushed their authoritative way through the shoving, raging,

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shouting host. They were powerful men, with clean Irish faces, and they were determined to get to the thief, even though they had to knock down and step upon any number of people before they reached him. So they pounded and shouldered their way along, and John was fascinated in watching their vigorous progress. A derby hat was crushed in now and then, ties and coats were disarranged, and finally the mutilated countenance of the thief was lost behind the giant palm of one of the "cops," as the boys called them, and the circle around the victim widened perceptibly.

John thought things were about over; that the man would simply now be led off to the station; but he did not know New York, and the ways of some of her guardians of the peace. The officer who was first to reach him not only held his throat in a tight grip, but began to shower blows with his club upon his hatless head. When John caught the sound of that initial hammer-blow, he thought he couldn't stand it. It seemed to echo through the whole street, and then reverberate in his heart. One blow was bad enough; but by this time the second officer had grabbed the ruffian by one arm, and seemed determined to enjoy the luxury of as many cracks as his comrade. The unfortunate man was literally dragged about the pavement for several minutes, and John could hear his frightful cries, and see his pitiful attempts to ward off the clubs that fell with dreadful precision upon him. The people reveled in the agonizing spectacle; and now, on the outskirts, the woman who had been robbed was the protagonist in a minor performance, and was led victoriously behind the beaten thief, enjoying her sudden conspicuousness on the way to the station.

He did not follow. He was really shocked, spiritually, at this exhibition of brutality. Such things could not be. He wanted to think it was a nightmare, wake up in the

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unaccustomed sleeper, and find a clean and glorious metropolis receiving him to her heart.

He turned back into the depot for a few moments. He wanted to collect himself, to fortify himself to go on. His dreams crashed, his ideals tumbled; and he was not ashamed when a slight mist came before his eyes. Life, in all its nakedness, had stared at him; and he could not look at once into her terrible face.

V

John had a definite plan, so boyish, so sentimental that he almost blushed when he thought of it now, after what he had witnessed. He wanted to seek out the office of the *Ladies' Banner,* in William street, and look up at the windows before he made his sloppy way to Brooklyn. It was foolish—doubly so since he had his heavy bag to carry and it was drizzling constantly; but he could not bring himself to leave New York until he had seen the only building which housed a friend of his in all the great hulking city. Moreover, the little side trip would take his mind from the cruelty he had just seen.

He had no sense of distance. How long it would take him to reach Brooklyn he could not guess; he might arrive at noon, or within an hour—he did not know. But at any rate, it was very early, and of course he had time to indulge his whim.

The Elevated road thrilled him. How could families live so close to these thundering trains, permitting the dust to enter their flats? How could they sleep with this crashing and puffing forever going on just outside their windows? He saw fat, heavy-faced women leaning on sofa-cushions on the sills, their heads sometimes stretched so far out, in gossip with a neighbor, that they seemed in danger of falling to the pavement. Children in filthy

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gingham dresses crept, in spite of the fine drizzle, upon the fire-escapes, and he was terrified lest they should tumble down. Every now and then, as the train flashed by, a hand shot forth to pull some of them in. When the car swerved into the Bowery, and he got a glimpse of the old weather-beaten Astor Library, for which he was on the lookout, he felt another twinge of disappointment. Somehow he had thought from its name, that it would be a wonderful building of monumental proportions, with fine statuary adorning it. Instead, he saw a hideous mass of dull grey stone, punctuated with grimy windows and dirty doorways. But the expanse of the Bowery thrilled him, and he changed his seat so that he could see the wide thoroughfare with its car-tracks and noisy traffic. He wondered how others in the train could remain so passive, and not even turn to look from the windows. If he stayed here all his life, he would never lose, he felt sure, his eagerness to peer into that street, to speculate upon all the lives lived behind those dim shutters.

VI

He got off when the guard called out "City Hall!" and made his way to the street. His blue eyes opened wide at the prospect before him. He knew enough about architecture to appreciate the beautiful proportions of the City Hall—that graceful turret rising exactly the height it should. And he knew that Park Row was immediately to his left. The Tribune Building, with its clock-tower, shot to the sky, seemingly. And there was the little Sun building, the humblest of the lot, tucked away like a shabby relation, yet not seeming at all ashamed of its appearance. Was it possible that through the doors of that tiny brick structure the young author of the Van Bibber stories had once passed? Did people recognize

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him as he emerged and went on some thrilling reportorial assignment? Think of actually seeing Richard Harding Davis! And James Townsend, who was making them laugh, even way up in the country, with his screamingly funny but philosophical Chimmie Fadden! That little building reminded him of a little man who might not be much to look at, but who had plenty of brains tucked away in his head. John remembered that column, "Poems Worth Reading," which appeared every Sunday, and how he found Riley's "Little Orphant Annie" in it one morning, and the thrill it gave him. Who made the selections, and would anything of his ever be thought worthy of a place there? How he would love the job of clipping the verses from all the magazines and papers throughout the land! Would he ever get to such a position, or be an editorial writer on one of these metropolitan dailies? Lord! how formidable their homes looked, on this drizzling morning, and how was he ever to find the courage to walk into any of those offices and tender his wares? For he had made up his mind that he was going to pick up some extra money by writing some Live Topics About Town—if the editor would take them. He would keep his eyes open, anyhow. That was the way to get along. The Times, in gray granite, and the old Herald Building farther down, leaning out to peer at the post-office and the Astor House held him spellbound even in this Sunday silence. But the World Building—he couldn't believe it possible. He knew it was closed today; and he had been told that the only time to go to the dome was on a clear afternoon. From this marvelous vantage point he was aware that a clean view of the city would be his. But that could wait. Much as these buildings amazed and stunned him, there was one on William Street, not far away, that would cause his heart to pound more loudly—perhaps, indeed, lose a beat.

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His bag was not light, and he had an umbrella in the bargain; but he was determined not to cross the thundering Bridge until he had found the office of the *Ladies' Banner*. He inquired his way of a policeman who looked milder than those officers uptown; and John wondered if he ever used his stick for any other purpose than to direct a stranger.

He made his way through narrow, winding little Frankfort street; and when the William street sign looked down at him from a crooked lamp-post, he was conscious of a curious thrill. Think of it—Mrs. Morgan probably came to this very turning every morning—his friend, who had read and accepted his verses! The editor whose signed editorials in her paper meant so much to the people in Stockton! But what a tiny, woe-begone street it was! Somehow he had thought it would be a wide boulevard, with maybe some trees on each side of it; but here it lay, pitifully dull, taking its way by close-shuttered hide factories—unromantic and rather smelly.

He found the number; and instead of an impressive building, he was confronted by a four-story brick edifice, as shabby as a woman in the slums, with blinds drawn—great iron blinds with little holes at the top, so that thieves could not get in and steal his precious manuscripts, John thought. Was this the place where Mrs. Morgan spent so many of her waking hours? Could it be possible that one could write editorials of the vast open spaces, in praise of farm life; at a stuffy desk that commanded no view at all? And was it to this dark door that the postman brought his poems, with heaps of others?

He put his bag on the sidewalk and looked up. The windows above the first floor were not sealed with shutters; but they were filthy with dust and grime. They looked as if they had never been washed; and in summer, John could imagine what odors must drift in from the

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hide factories. He wanted to get on the staff of the *Ladies' Banner*—that is what had brought him to New York; and he and Mrs. Morgan had had some correspondence on the subject. But would he care for it now? His heart sank at the prospect of long hours spent here. Yet why had he conjured up a vision of marble floors and gleaming roll-top desks, neat office-boys and slim, delicate typists? On the few occasions when he had been to Utica or Syracuse, he had noted the pleasant business blocks there; but that did not mean that New York would contain offices of the same character. He should have known that in the larger city there would be narrower streets and dingier buildings; for Miss Lucy had told him how the houses seemed to huddle together in New York; and he remembered she had told him how disappointed she was with Wall Street—"as narrow as a fence," she put it. If Wall Street, which he had heard so much about, was like that, what could he expect of William? Well, he would learn, and learn fast; and his one consolation was that he had come here this morning, and would have time to outgrow his sense of disappointment before he called to see Mrs. Morgan tomorrow, or whenever she would permit him to come.

Dolefully he found his way back to the Bridge entrance, where the cars congregated in frantic confusion. Starters shouted out vague directions, and John was relieved when he heard others inquiring their way. He was not the only ignoramus in this city, after all!

He referred to the paper Miss Lucy had given him, and as luck would have it, a Putnam Avenue car came along the moment he looked up; and he was off on his first ride over Brooklyn Bridge. Again the people looked tired and worn; doubtless most of them had been through a week of hard work—he knew how the city ground one down; and no doubt within a few months he would look

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equally tired, and shadows would come beneath his eyes. But how could he stay in Stockton? There was only one country paper there—a makeshift affair, ungrammatical and absurd, with an old editor who owned it himself, and made a poor living out of it, and nothing more. John craved the contacts of the city; and after four years away from home at a small college, the thought of going back and calmly sitting down and vegetating in Stockton was unbearable.

VII

Through the light rain he could scarcely see the wonders of the harbor, as the car made its way over the giant harp that connected the two cities. But he rose from his seat and looked, as best he could, at the panorama beneath him, all around him. That was Brooklyn, of course, ahead of him, and he asked the passenger next him where the Statue of Liberty would be. "Over there," the stranger said, pointing in the direction of Bedloe's Island; and sure enough, in the hazy morning his keen, eager eyes could discern the form of the famous goddess, her arm upraised. Actually to see her! It was a great moment for John. How immense everything was, and how unconcerned the people forever seemed, with this magic and glory about them. The houses of New York, packed together like cherries in a box, seemed to have no spaces at all between them now, as he got away from them. The river and harbor craft below him were shooting in all directions; and he could hear the far, shrill cries of whistles, and always, of course, the rumbling of the cars and trucks as they sped across the Bridge. His brain whirled once or twice—he could not grasp the enormity of this pageant, could not take it in at all. He had never been up so high in the air, and he experienced a sensation of ecstasy, as

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though he were floating mysteriously on a cloud, and had been strangely released from the world. Think of the people down there, in that limitless forest of houses! And he knew not one of them—not one of all those millions! Terror came over him. How had he dared to seek out this awful place, and hope to make a name in such a maze? What madness had caused him to believe that anyone here would come to know him, believe in him, even speak to him? It would take weeks, even months, for him to find his way about; and through those canyons of the city he would doubtless walk many a weary mile, alone, day after day.

VIII

At the other end of the Bridge, the cars took different directions; and he found himself riding under the Elevated road, through rows of iron pillars. It was as though he were going through a lane of stark, dead trees; and if New York had seemed strangely hushed in the downtown section, here there was almost an arcadian silence. Blue shades were drawn over most of the shop windows; and only once in a while did he glimpse a store that was open—a cigar store, with a newsstand in front of it, and the image of an Indian. As they came to each corner, he peered out, and could see quiet homes, with little front yards, and many trees. He intuitively sensed the difference between Brooklyn and the metropolis. This was more homelike, more cozy; and Miss Lucy had been wise to advise him to come here.

The conductor came and politely told him when they were nearing his street. He was all excitement. *His* street! It had a sound of permanence, of personal ownership; and he wondered, as he stepped off, how many times he would arrive at this corner, and come to know every foot of the ground.

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He saw a row of low brick dwellings, with tiny yards behind wooden fences. They were all alike; and the dreadful monotony of their appearance at first made him want to laugh. Then he saw the tragic side of such a mode of building and living, and he almost wanted to weep. Was it possible that people resided happily in such stupid conformity, their walls touching, yet with no spiritual and human contacts? Was it true, as he had heard, that a person could die up the street, a crêpe be put upon the door, and the others in this line of houses not know his name, and not care at all that someone had passed away? He compared Stockton with this—and his whole heart cried out for the little home village, set like a jewel in that valley up the State. Even in a storm, Stockton had a beauty, a pensive serenity that he loved; for, like tears, rain softened its face; but his first thought here was that the rain brought out all the wrinkles in a city's countenance; and down narrow gutters the ugly torrent poured, making seams in the forehead and the cheeks.

He rang the bell of the house he sought. The narrow wooden veranda sagged, and one or two of the boards were greatly in need of repair. A crude wire netting ran from the base of the railing to the roof, with the evident intention of luring vines astray when summer came. The house itself was what Dickens would have called shabby-genteel. A mat with a mud-stained "Welcome" imprinted upon it, was chained to the floor—though heaven knows there was little danger that anyone would wish to steal it. He waited for two or three moments before anyone answered his ring, and in the meantime looked across the street, where another row of houses, with spaces between them, and set on terraces, faced him. A servant girl had come out of one of them to gather up the papers that had been left on the porch; but save for this desultory activity, there was no spark of life in any of the dwellings. He

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did not know enough of city ways to realize that this was no hour to arrive at a person's door. In Stockton, one could drop in any time—at breakfast, at the midday dinner, or at supper—and during all the hours that lay drowsily in between.

After an interval, a middle-aged woman, holding one hand at the throat of her wrapper, opened the door warily. She must have been about fifty-five, John guessed. She had a flabby skin, and a nose that seemed lost in it. Her hair was untidy, of that grayish-brown color that is neither one thing nor the other; and her loose house-wrapper did not fit her short, stocky figure, and there were grease-spots upon it which would never come out. A hideous flannel wrapper it was; and once upon a time it had been red and yellow. Now it was the tone of mud and of salmon that has been cooked too long.

"Is this Mrs. Deeley?" John asked, removing his hat, and hoping against hope that it was not.

"Yes, I am," came the disconcerting answer. "You're Mr. Darrow, I suppose?" The door opened just a bit wider; but the knotted hand still grasped it tightly, as if mutely to give testimony that it controlled the entrance, in case this was some intruder.

"Yes, Mrs. Deeley. I have a letter to you from Miss Lucy Shaw."

"Oh, yes, I remember her. Come in, Mr. Darrow, won't you?" And now she flung the door open wide, and he saw behind her a hall not unlike those so common at home —a hatrack on the right, a stairway leading to the bedrooms above, and a door on the left that was draped with a hideous striped curtain of some thick, unyielding material. The carpet was worn and shabby; and there was a distinct odor of breakfast from below, not unpleasant.

In the dimmer light of the hall, Mrs. Deeley was not quite so ill to look upon. A person opening a door on the

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outside world facing the sudden light is always at a great disadvantage.

"You must excuse my appearance—I'm just getting breakfast, and I didn't have time to dress up. We didn't expect you so early."

She led him into the parlor, and he put his bag beside the haircloth sofa, but hurriedly told her he must leave his dripping umbrella in the rack in the hall.

"Oh, do! My carpet will be ruined!" she cried, and pushed the curtain back so that he could get instantly into the hall again.

John felt he had made a most unpropitious beginning. There was something pathetic about Mrs. Deeley, something drab and careworn and fidgetty, and he wondered if he was to enter another home where the mother loved to fret and worry.

She read Miss Lucy's note, after looking wildly for her glasses and at last finding them; and then she told him he could stay in the back room on the second floor at the same rate Miss Lucy had paid—five dollars a week. But they served no meals; and he would have to go around the corner in Hanson Place for them—she knew a good boarding-house; and she was sure he could be fixed up for another five at Mrs. Thompson's. They owned this house, John gathered; but of course there were taxes to pay, and running expenses—"We don't keep a servant, though; can't afford one. Do you mind?" she said, rather pathetically. "My daughter Alice and I do the housework, and we manage all right enough. Mr. Deeley's half sick most of the time, Mr. Darrow; but my son Nick has a good situation, and he's the best boy in the world. Now wouldn't you like to look at the room, and maybe wash up some after your trip?"

She was one of those people who tell everything they know—which is usually very little—at the first meeting,

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and then go on repeating it forever after. She went to the foot of the stairs and called loudly, "Nick! Oh, Nick! Come on down, won't you? Mr. Darrow's here!"

And a voice above answered,

"Yes, Ma; right down!"

It was a fine, mellow voice, with a little accent of affection on the "Ma" which caused John to like the owner of it even before he saw him.

"Had your breakfast?" Mrs. Deeley wanted to know, turning back to the parlor, where John had been trying to make himself feel at home. There were hideously upholstered chairs, a centre table on which rested the family Bible; and on the floor at its legs three shells and a red plush album. The figured wall paper could scarcely have been uglier, as it strolled down to meet the equally ugly figured carpet, and the top of the upright piano was crowded with music and hand-painted vases, and a big black ebony clock that ticked loudly in the semi-darkness. The veranda shut out most of the light that should have swept into the room, and the shades were drawn down part way as if they had entered into a conspiracy with the porch to cast gloom over the scene. Starched lace curtains were draped back, held in place by cheap brass chains; and the pictures on the walls were all hung too high, and revealed the faces of dead relatives, the males almost completely concealed behind marvelous hirsute growths that flowed downward into the frames; the females with such smug, set mouths that one almost wished they too had been adorned with beards so that the smugness and hardness could have been hidden. There were two chromos over the mantelpiece, evidently of Mr. and Mrs. Deeley in their youth. The tragic change in the woman's face—how did people dare to leave these early portraits on their walls, for the whole world to see what cruel Time had done? The oval face

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had become a pudgy mass, and the bright, alert eyes two dim, red-rimmed holes on each side of an infinitesimal nose. If Mr. Deeley was now an invalid, certainly here he appeared in the most robust health; and his heavy, dark mustache looked like a black evening tie that had not been fastened tightly enough. His abundant hair was brushed back in waves from a rather noble forehead; but the chin was weak, and the eyes were those of a man who was full of projects that would inevitably fail—a dreamer, but not a practical dreamer; a type who would not be able, perhaps, to survive one blow.

On the brass chandelier that drooped down from the low ceiling, someone had hung a pink satin ribbon, on the end of which was the tiniest silver bell—a favor from a party, John imagined; but why it should have been placed here only the angels knew. Every chair protected its back with a crocheted doilie, fastened with a great safety-pin which there was no effort to conceal. Very few books were about; but someone had left the *Brooklyn Eagle* on the sofa, and one sheet had fallen to the floor. Mrs. Deeley, as she spoke, picked this up before John realized what she was doing. It was too late to do it for her.

"Thank you, yes," he said, in answer to her question. "But if you don't mind, I *would* like to go upstairs with my bag."

At that instant he heard footsteps—lively footsteps—on the stairs; and a young fellow of about his own age, undoubtedly Nick, came in. He was good-looking, with dark brown eyes and thick, curling hair which he combed back from his face, just as his father had done in his youth. Indeed, the resemblance to the portrait over the mantel was striking; but it was wonderful what the new generation did with itself. There was an aliveness about Nick which the father had never had. He came into the room like some young animal and instantly the dingy

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place lit up with his presence, and John was not sorry he had found his way to this family. Here was someone with whom he felt he could be friends at once; and he liked Nick's generous mouth, his keen brown eyes, his well set-up figure, his up-to-the-minute clothes, which made his own look rather dowdy and countrified. He liked, also, the way he shook hands, with a firm grip, as if he meant the clasp to say, "You're all right. Welcome!"

IX

They made him sit down to breakfast with them. The dining-room was below the level of the street, cramped and gloomy. Because it was Sunday, they all got up much later than usual. Alice had come down and helped her mother at the last minute. She was eighteen, and, as so often tragically happens in a family, the good looks had gone to the boy. Her face was plain, and she made it plainer by combing her hair back from her high forehead with one desperate gesture. It was straight, colorless hair—"A shame for Nick to have the curls," Mrs. Deeley always said, though she adored her son. But she would have given much if Alice had been better looking. The girl had freckles in abundance, and it was impossible to decide whether her full lips denoted sensuality or stupidity. Her teeth were crowded together, almost overlapped, as though they were a little regiment in barracks and wanted to get out into the air. The eyes were hazel —the best feature she had, poor girl; and their good points were augmented by thick lashes overshadowing them. She was slim and rather tall; and this morning she wore a neat little blue gown. She was going to church later. She seemed glad that John had come to them, and kept urging him to eat more. "Another cup of coffee won't hurt you. . . . Oh, does it make you nervous?" She said this twice during the meal.

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Mr. Deeley came downstairs as a special favor. He was not bedridden, by any means, but merely preferred to loll about in mysterious solitude on the third floor, and have Alice fetch his meals to him on a tray. But on Sunday, or on the few occasions when there were visitors, he always made a point of roaming to the lower regions, coughing a bit to advertise the fact that he was not in the best of health, complaining now and then of a draft, and wondering who had taken his *Eagle*. His face was waxen, and the thirty years which had elapsed since his portrait was done had certainly been unkind to him. His hair was now thin and gray, the heavy mustache bore coffee stains. The eyes were pale and weak, and very vague behind thick spectacles. Once in a while his hand trembled—always after he had poured his coffee into his saucer and lifted it to his lips. He never asked for a second cup; he merely raised both cup and saucer, directed them toward his wife, and rattled them in his shaking hand. The spoon sometimes fell on the tablecloth, whereupon there would be a gasped "Oh, Father!" from Alice. But when he came back for the third cup, the same thing invariably happened. No wonder Alice preferred it when the old man remained in his room, even though it fell upon her to carry his food to him.

X

John's room was pleasant enough; and the one bathroom in the little house was next to it. He and Nick would be getting up about the same time every morning, and no doubt there would be some scrambling for its use.

"I have to be at the bank at nine o'clock," the son of the house told him. "What time are you due in New York?"

As John had made no definite arrangements for a job, he had to tell the other that he didn't know.

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"Do you mean to say you've come all the way down here before you know just what you're going to do?" Nick inquired.

"Yes, exactly. Maybe I was a fool," John said, and his face went crimson. This lively, get-there-quick young man rather took his breath away. They were sitting in John's room, after breakfast, while Alice and her mother were clearing away the dishes, and Mr. Deeley had disappeared again to his vague haunts above. He couldn't bring himself to tell Nick that he hoped to get a position on the editorial staff of the *Ladies' Banner,* over in William street. It sounded so nebulous, when he hadn't even interviewed the proprietor. And nothing would have induced him to tell this healthy young animal that he wrote verse.

"Got a wheel?" Nick wanted to know.

"Yes; it's coming in a day or two," John replied. "What make is yours?"

Now they were on common ground; and in the freemasonry of devoted riders, they launched into the subject of the relative merits of the various makes; and when it developed that each owned the same kind of bicycle, their friendship was sealed.

"Too bad it's raining today," Nick said, looking out of the window at the exasperating drops, coming down harder than ever now. "I'd take you around the city, and through Prospect Park. But I'd like you to see things at their best—this is no day for a ride." And he smiled. "Gosh! I hate a Sunday when it rains. Bores me to death to stay home."

"Don't you go to church?"

"Oh, yes—have to, in this house. Mother's a strict Methodist, and Alice teaches a class of children in Sunday school. I generally go nights, so I can sleep as late as I want to Sunday mornings. It's more fun, too."

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"Fun?" John didn't understand the word in connection with church.

"Oh, the girls come out more, then; and we generally get a soda at Kennedy's or Fischer's after service, and walk out in the Park or up Nostrand or Green Avenue. The singing's better then, too. Got a dandy choir at our church. I hate sermons, don't you?"

John was not very religious. He had been brought up by a Presbyterian mother and father; but they were not active church people. Yet within their son was that keen appreciation of the beauty of a ritual, the sound of a booming organ and voices in a responsive reading of the Psalms. Beyond this, he did not care to analyze what religion meant. He had read Voltaire and Pater; and he liked the poetry of Swinburne and Matthew Arnold, though he clung, puritanically enough, to the solidity of Tennyson and Wordsworth, and thought of Byron as a libertine.

"I don't know that I hate sermons," John offered; "but I can't say they interest me much—unless they're very fine."

"Mother's funny," Nick went on, seeming to swerve from the subject in hand, but really keeping on it. "She used to hate to see us ride our wheels on Sunday; but she's reformed now. I told her I wouldn't go to church at all, unless I could ride down to Coney when I wanted to, Sunday or no Sunday." He laughed, and put his feet up on a chair. He had pulled out a cigarette, and now he lighted it, forgetting to offer John one. After he had closed the box, he realized his delinquency, and said, "Oh, do you smoke?" and handed one over.

John took it and got a match. He looked about the room, and wondered if they would let him build three or four shelves for his books. He couldn't live in a place unless he had his favorite authors with him. But he didn't

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dare broach the subject now—it was too soon, he felt; and Nick would want to know why he read so much, perhaps, and that would get him on the subject of his literary ambitions. He could not tell why he was ashamed to talk of his writing. A man wasn't self-conscious when he spoke of playing the piano or working in a bank. Why were poets so fearful of being laughed at? But he was not merely a poet. The editorial instinct was even stronger in him. From the time he was old enough to walk, he couldn't recall a moment when he had not loved the smell of printers' ink; and every volume that came into his hands had to be smelt, as well as read. Newspapers appealed to him; and he had liked nothing better than to go into the office of the Stockton *Mercury,* watch the typesetters and drink in that intoxicating odor that lingers in a composing-room. When the little presses rattled, and the clean, fragrant sheets came out with the miraculous columns printed upon them, he always felt a thrill, and wondered if the day would ever come when he would edit a paper of his own, be responsible for what went into it, and even have his own contributions featured in boldfaced type—editorials that would cause people to sit up.

"We'll go to the old M. E. church some night—how about this evening?" Nick was saying. "Nothing much else to do. And I'll introduce you to some girls."

"Thanks; that'll be nice," John answered. "But I want to get settled a little, and I think I ought to go to bed early tonight, so as to be bright and in good shape for tomorrow. And I must make my arrangements around the corner for my meals, you know. How can I do that?"

"Oh, I forgot. I'll take you over any time you want to go." Nick took his feet down, as though he would start instantly. "But we might as well wait till the rain lets up. If it's too stormy, mother'll be only too glad to have you eat Sunday dinner with us. There's always plenty,

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you know." There was something most hospitable in his tone. "I only wish we could board you, too. Make it more fun for us all."

John was really touched by this remark. Brooklyn wasn't such a bad place, after all, if people were as generous as this.

Yet how lonely he did feel, despite the kindness of the Deeleys! He wrote to his mother that night—a long letter of his first impressions of the big cities that rubbed elbows with each other; and he told her he was very happy indeed, and had already made friends.

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CHAPTER II

I

MRS. ANASTASIA MORGAN wrote sunny, optimistic thumb-nail editorials and verses for the *Ladies' Banner* with her right hand, and pulled in the shekels with her left. She had married a publisher in her extreme youth—she was now about forty-five—and she had always had an inclination to reform the world—from a comfortable home uptown. But she never offended her readers. Part of her policy was to "play safe." The middle classes did not like to be told too many flat truths. They liked sunshine and happiness; and Mrs. Morgan had been an ardent disciple of that school of uplift writers who reigned in the seventies—T. S. Arthur and Jenny June were the king and queen bee of the hive. "How to Keep Your Husband" was one of her favorite themes. She found it fascinating to pry into the home life of her friends and relatives, to take little trips occasionally to rural districts and "study" character, and then go home and write her impressions in a chatty, sentimental vein. She loved humanity when she was not too close to the smelly mob. She was expert at quoting Whitman—the printable passages, that is; and she harped on democracy and brotherhood the while she was sharp and dictatorial with her servants. She liked nothing better than to ride in a hansom; but the readers of the *Ladies' Banner* somehow got the impression that their editor adored the Elevated road,

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for she was always painting vivid pictures of the charm of a rapid tour in the air through Second and Third Avenues. "The streets of the thundering city are filled with wonder —for those who have the eyes to see," was the way she frequently put it; and she was strong for "lilacs in the park" and "trees with their crown of green"; and she was always aching, it would seem, to be "out on the open road, away from the turmoil and fret," the while she warmed her feet at her fender. She was the forerunner of the Pollyanna group who were to appear on the horizon much later; and in that photograph of herself which necessarily appeared on the first page of the *Banner* every month, she wore a beatific smile that won the reader at once. She had cultivated a "radiant" personality; and though New Thought is an old thought people were not articulate about it at the beginning of the present century; yet Anastasia Morgan subtly knew that if she could get her large clientèle to think in terms of stupid optimism, she would not have to worry about her own future. To feather one's nest was imperative in these rushing days, and so she scribbled diligently about "duty" and friendship and the joyous romance of mere living, and preached the doctrine of being happy wherever you were. And while her husband pulled in the subscriptions and attended to all those sordid practical details which rubbed her sensitive soul the wrong way (so she said) she helped vigorously with her trenchant pen, and they were both on the road to a comfortable old age.

But a year before, Eli Morgan had suddenly died; and his widow found it necessary to go down to the William street office every day and see that the clerks and typists did their duty—that duty which she had preached so ceaselessly—and learn how an office is run from the inside. She was a shrewd, far-seeing woman; and she did not intend to let the *Banner* slip through her fingers just as it

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was on a paying basis, be "done" by dishonest printers and paper manufacturers and see her little hoard eaten up in one devastating moment. It was hard to drop her artistic pose in the twinkling of an eye and have to come down to the grimy office without her mask, and peer into the accountant's cage. The whole staff had thought of her as a vague, nebulous quantity, guarded by a loving, devoted husband who wished above all things to have her preserve a mysterious aloofness that could be capitalized, without doubt. The veil must never be drawn; and it never was, while Eli lived. In a hushed seclusion in Lexington Avenue he allowed his wife—he used to call her his little genius—to nurse her muse at a desk by a sunny window; and he himself would pick up the bits of paper on which were written her immortal words, have them typed and forward them to the printer. When he passed away, she missed him terribly, and found it hard to learn not to toss her copy upon the floor. With no one to gather it up, the zest of an artistic abandon was gone. So she began at once to be methodical, lest her bank account dwindle.

At the end of a year, she had learned many things, not the least important of which was that it was far pleasanter to work at home than down in William street, with an eternal clatter and bang about her. Her editorials seemed to lose some of their crispness; and she was too clever not to realize that subscriptions would fall off unless a certain standard was maintained. Her poetry she let drop altogether—how could she think in terms of rhyme when life was a jangle and her days were sweet bells out of tune? She grieved for Eli—the steady, hard-working, dependable Eli, who had made her life a bed of roses.

When John Darrow's charming lyrics made their appearance on her desk one morning, with an unerring edi-

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torial instinct she saw in him a possibility. Here was a youth from a small up-State town who had read the *Banner,* since his mother subscribed to it and the evenings were long; and he had a knack for the pleasing phrase, the inoffensive word. His letters, after the first acceptance she sent him, bubbled with enthusiasm; and when he told her of his desire to come to the great city and make his way as an editor and writer, she rather encouraged him in his dream. But she was cautious enough not to commit herself. There were vague promises—but after all they were only promises. She wanted to see and talk with John before she definitely made any arrangement with him. Couldn't he run down for a week or so, and call upon her when he arrived? She had just sent him five dollars for a poem; and this would pay his carfare one way. Surely his stationery revealed that he was not altogether penniless. She had a plan in mind; but a New England father and mother prevented her from taking any risks. "Suppose you send me a nature editorial, suitable for our May issue," she had written John, in February, "and, if it proves to be all I expect of you, I will send you a liberal check for it."

John wrote a prose fancy; a description of an apple-orchard in full bloom; and ended with the sadly youthful thought that when he died he wished to be buried underneath one of these great candelabra of the Spring, which would be a fitting tombstone for a poet.

It was that little phrase, "great candelabra of the Spring" which brought him a check for twenty-five dollars —more than he had ever earned in his life—and gave him a definite place in the heart of Anastasia Morgan. She saw the possibilities of John in the twinkling of an eye. He was not too intellectual; but he undoubtedly had the poetic gift in abundance; and twenty-two was pliable and could be moulded into any shape. She was very tired after

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a solid year of business worries, which had, however, developed rather well for her; but she needed a vacation, and Caleb Buncey, her managing editor and accountant (the *Banner* was thrifty and frequently the staff "doubled," like actors), lived up to his name. He was getting old and crusty, and was retained only because Eli had liked him, and had mentioned in his will that he hoped he would be allowed to stay on the staff and send the paper regularly to press, and pay the bills. But Anastasia knew that some young blood was needed if the magazine was to keep going. There was much competition now—it was not such plain sailing today; and they must get flashier covers, perhaps change the type—or did she need glasses? —and make other improvements. A live subscription man would soon be necessary. Eli had had a great talent for writing snappy circular letters, and the ideas he had told her of and mentally bequeathed to her were almost exhausted. She could no longer draw on the old stock. Yes, they must perk up in both the business and editorial departments; and John Darrow was promising material in one field. Perhaps he could help all along the way.

II

"So this is Mr. Darrow!"

She got up from her dusty desk, her rather trim figure silhouetted against the soiled window, and looked at him with interest. She liked at once his frank countenance—the face of a young man utterly uncontaminated by the world. There literally seemed to be a light behind it; and in his boyish eagerness now, John's eyes were full of fire. He always brushed his hair straight back from his fine forehead, and this gave him an alert look. He did not conform to any of the world's conceptions as to what a poet should be like, physically. His hair was neatly

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clipped, there was nothing dingy about him, and his clothes, while not fashionable, were of good material and fitted him well. His hands were the sensitive hands of the artist, with long tapering fingers, and white as a woman's. He had a look of race—a background; and he was one of those rare people who attract attention the moment they enter a room. He was distinguished, rather than good-looking; and his voice was warm. He might have been a singer, had not literature called more insistently to him.

"How nice to meet you, Mrs. Morgan, after your generous correspondence," he said, simply enough. He liked her, too. She was rosy and pleasant, and she kept her hat on in the dirty little editorial office. The cornflowers in it bobbed up and down, and were like a blue flame in a dim place. There was not a single streak of gray in her well-kept hair, and her brown eyes, a little tired now, were as keen as his own. She looked older, of course, than the photograph used on her editorial page; but it was not an unpleasant maturity. Success seemed to go with it. She rustled when she moved, and there was a delicious odor—very faint—of some delicate perfume, and he thought of an aunt of his who always smelt of Christmas—he had never been able to say why.

They were in a semi-private office. The board partition did not ascend to the ceiling, and the natural translucent glass of it, as well as the unnatural translucent glass of the window, permitted some light to sift in. He could hear the noise of typewriters outside, clicking, clicking; and far off somewhere the pleasant boom of printing-presses. Even in the excitement of meeting his first editor, John was conscious of every detail around him—he had a gift for photographing on his brain anything he wished to remember; and he imagined that one or two clerks came close to the other side of the partition, and tried to listen

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to what was being said. Their vague figures, like ghosts from another world, were impressed upon the pane, and rather annoyed him.

Mrs. Morgan's desk was an artistic litter. He noted that the inkwell needed cleaning; and it came to him that he would have been glad to perform that humble service, just for the privilege of being employed in this thrilling office. At last, at last the greatest moment of his life had arrived! He was talking to a New York editor, in her private office. She would never know what this meeting meant to him; but he wondered if he was revealing his excitement, if she guessed how his young heart pounded, how his knees almost sank beneath him when he came up the stairs.

"I liked that editorial so much," she said, cordially, and leaned back in her chair. "I want you to do some more in a similar vein. Do you suppose you can?"

"I can try, at least, Mrs. Morgan," he answered modestly; yet he was confident of himself this morning—he had decided, after his long talk the evening before with the wise Nick, that this was the only way to get along in the big city.

"Well, how would you like to come here on our staff?" she began; and John's heart missed a beat at the intimate phrase. On *our* staff! He was really to be one of them—an editor at last, a living part of the machinery that set these wheels turning! He heard her continue: "And how much do you think you could live on? We don't pay big salaries on the *Banner,* you know; perhaps you guessed that, seeing the checks we sent you for your poems." She smiled amiably. "But we have always done the best we could." Her canny New England ancestry was speaking now; also, perhaps, the voice of her dead husband, who knew how to make a bargain if ever a man did. How much Anastasia had learned from Eli! His austere face

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looked out of a frame on her desk, a perpetual reminder to make haste slowly in any business deal.

"Oh, I know that," the poet in John answered. "Anything you say, Mrs. Morgan, will be perfectly satisfactory to me. I want experience, you know; and I could get a lot here. And I like the *Banner* tremendously."

It was easier than she supposed. Yes, he was of exactly the right temperament for her purpose; but she must not appear too ready to close the arrangement.

"I want you to meet Mr. Buncey," she said, pressing a button. A girl—one of the figures on the other side of the partition—immediately came in.

"Tell Mr. Buncey I would like to see him," Mrs. Morgan said; and looked at John as though to say, "You see, I am the boss here. They must all come to me when I summon them."

She told him the *Banner* was not doing quite so well—this was in strict confidence, of course. He was thrilled at the intimacy of the revelation, the taking of him at once into the bosom of the family. She toyed with her long gold chain as she spoke. She did not believe in mourning—she had preached this in the bright pages of the *Banner*. "If Mr. Buncey thinks you will do, I imagine we could take you at, say—" she paused the fraction of a second, and John hung breathlessly on her words—"well, perhaps fifteen dollars a week, to start."

He could not believe it. Surely this was not possible—fifteen dollars a week, only ten of which would go for his board and lodging. The rest would be his own, for pocket money—five dollars to spend as he wished! The thought of a pay-envelope made him dizzy.

A thin individual, whose age could not be guessed, or even approximated, came in. He had a bald head, fringed with straw-colored hair that curled, and gave him the appearance of a shabby saint with a rather shabby halo. His

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eyes were vague and pale behind thick-lensed glasses, and while his legs were thin, he had a little round belly, like the Santa Claus of the poem, that would have shaken had he ever laughed. But his lips were too thin for laughter. He perpetually wet them, nervously, and rubbed his claw-like hands together, like an old Uriah Heap.

"Mr. Buncey, this is Mr. Darrow—you know, the Mr. Darrow who has written a few things for us," Mrs. Morgan said.

John rose, and took the pallid little man's right hand in his own. It was as though he squeezed the fingers of a four-year-old child; and there was a dampness in the palm that he did not like.

"Pleased to meet you!" piped Caleb Buncey, and sat himself in a chair on the other side of the desk. As he did so, he threw his linen office coat open, and John saw a vivid expanse of red worsted—Buncey's weakness was flowery waistcoats, which his poor wife was forever knitting. This one had buttons of brass, which gleamed like bits of imprisoned sunlight. Out in the cashier's cage he looked like a vivid cockatoo.

He peered at John sharply, appraised him, wondered about him, remembered exactly how much of the good *Banner* money had gone to him in checks for contributions, and was not surprised when Mrs. Morgan told him she had about decided to take him on the staff.

"Mr. Buncey has complete charge of our auditing department," the lady proprietor informed John, "and it will be necessary for you, in my absence, to consult with him on everything. He knows our rates, and he will help you in every way possible. I want you to get acquainted. Mr. Buncey, do all you can to help Mr. Darrow, won't you?" she said sweetly. "I am sure you will get on well together. I'll talk things over more in detail another time. This morning I simply wanted you to meet. That

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will be about all now, Mr. Buncey," she added; and the little man, who had evidently settled himself down for a long conference, and was enjoying his release from the dreary monotony of his cashier's cage, and his proofs, popped to his feet at once, a little chagrined that the meeting had not taken on more importance.

The long and short of it was that John Darrow took his place on the editorial staff of the *Ladies' Banner* the very next day; and he walked out of the office on air. It was only half-past ten when he left William street; but he was so elated that he stopped at Perry's Drug Store, on the ground floor of the World Building and spent five cents on a vanilla soda, with ice-cream. Then he telegraphed his mother; and as it was a wonderful clean cool March day, he found his way to the Battery, through the canyon of Broadway, and dreamed until noon as he gazed out on the glistening Bay.

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CHAPTER III

I

MRS. THOMPSON'S boarding-house on Hanson Place was a heterogeneous affair. There was a Mr. Hall who had lived there for seventeen years, and had occupied the same room during that period. The legend was told that once when Mrs. Thompson was certain his walls required fresh paper, he cried and stormed all night because he had to move to another room while the work was in progress. A nervous little man he was, who stood behind one of the counters of Abraham and Strauss's store on Fulton street all day, and sat in Mrs. Thompson's parlor all evening, twirling his thumbs. He paid his board with the regularity of the tides, and he had never been known to miss a meal. Every evening at dinner when the maid named the two desserts which were invariably served, he hesitated as though in deep thought, and then said, "A little of each, please," no matter what they were.

Mrs. Graham, a dowdy widow who trimmed hats somewhere downtown was also a steady, quiet boarder, who loved lemon soda and grapes, and told everyone that she came from one of the best and oldest Southern families, and wasn't it an outrage that ladies had to work, and what was the world coming to anyhow when such a condition was possible, and if only Mr. Graham had lived she wouldn't be in Brooklyn—oh, no! Men weren't as chivalrous as they used to be, and she sighed for the good

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old days, and eased her daily burden by reading the romances of Robert W. Chambers.

But of course the one person in the basement dining-room who most interested John was the little stenographer who toiled in a pump factory down in Erie Basin. She was as pretty as a daffodil, with fluffy hair the color, almost, of that gay Spring flower; and her blue eyes were not meant to bother over enigmatic quirks and cryptic signs invented by a certain barbarous Mr. Pitman. Her skin was like ivory, with little faint blue veins to give it color; and John could never visualize those dainty fingers pressing the keys of a typewriter, pounding out stupid letters beginning "Yours of even date to hand and contents noted; in reply would say." Surely destiny should have placed Mary Gwynne in another environment.

She did not have to breakfast as early as he; so it was only at dinner that he got a chance to talk with her. On the first evening after he had been engaged by the *Banner,* and came home to South Portland Avenue jubilant and excited, he went to his room to freshen up for the evening meal. He sang as he changed his linen; and Nick, in the bathroom washing up, heard him, and sang too. A duet was soon in progress, with false notes in every other bar; but twenty-two only laughs at its mistakes—if it pauses even to do that.

"Feeling good, aren't you?" Nick called out at the breathless conclusion of one ascending strain.

"You bet!" cried John. "The job is great. I love every minute of it."

"Wait till you're there a month, and then see what you have to say," the pessimistic son of the house answered.

"Nonsense! I'll always like magazine work. There's nothing else for me."

Nick had about completed his ablutions, and now came into John's room—the door was ajar—a towel envelop-

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ing his face. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and when his features emerged from the towel John thought how devil-may-care he looked, and what trouble he must give the girls. He had ridden a wheel so much that his figure was as lithe as a panther's. His hair was rumpled and was even more becoming when disarranged, as curly hair is bound to be. In fact, he appeared far more the poet than John, whose straight brown locks never gave him any trouble at all.

"Say," Nick said, "how would you like to take a spin tonight—your wheel came this afternoon, Ma says. I want to show you the pretty part of Brooklyn. Maybe we could get down as far as Coney, though there is nothing there yet but the ocean. It isn't a bit cold. But I've got a sweater if you think you'll need it."

"It sounds fine," John answered, pulling at his tie. "But maybe my wheel needs some fixing up."

"Oh, I'll look it over while you're having dinner," the generous Nick offered. "Come back here as soon as you can, and we'll get an early start."

"All right. It's mighty fine of you."

II

The olives had been passed twice while they waited for their soup at Mrs. Thompson's. It was John's first real meal in the house—breakfast hardly counted, for the various boarders came in sporadically, two or three women of leisure triumphantly at nine. But at dinner they all got together like chickens at feeding time, and all as chipper, usually, as barnyard fowl.

Mr. Hall, through his long association with the house, as he put it, sat at one end of the table, and gathered his little vegetable plates about him until he resembled a soldier behind a fort; and he sent out the ammunition

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of his dire wit with terrible regularity. He had set a new standard in boredom. He eyed any newcomer with suspicion; and when John made his formal appearance in the doorway, after all the others were seated, he cast baleful glances upon him, and paused in the midst of eating slowly and distinctly, to take in the boyish figure and face.

"You're to sit next to Miss Gwynne," Mrs. Thompson rose and said, in a voice that was hard because she had screamed at such a long procession of lazy servants.

That was John's first glimpse of Mary Gwynne; and he blessed the kindly fate that had sent him to this house for his meals. Somehow he had always thought of city girls as anæmic, fragile creatures, ready to drop into their coffins. His healthy sisters and all the other girls in Stockton had such high coloring that he was afraid he wouldn't have much use for the sickly maidens in New York; but to his intense delight he had seen many who were as robust, apparently, as any of the girls who perpetually breathed fresh country air.

One could not call Mary Gwynne particularly robust in appearance; but she did not suggest a shut-in existence. Her pallor was a spiritual pallor, and her eyes had all the wonder of a child's, and mean streets were as enchanting to her as perfumed lanes of hawthorn on a Spring night.

She fixed her gaze on John as he sat beside her, and for a moment he was not conscious of another human being in the room. A deathlike silence followed; and then the colored maid came in with a tray laden with dishes of soup; the raucous voice of Mrs. Thompson was endeavoring to introduce him to Mr. Hall, Mrs. Graham, Miss Taylor, Mr. and Mrs. Eckols, and a pallid bookkeeper whose name he did not catch.

They all sensed at once that he was different from them—different from the kind of young man who boarded

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in Brooklyn. John's distinction was an asset which he never considered; and his wholesome countenance would have made almost anyone like him immediately. It was nothing short of an ordeal to find himself projected into this strange place; and for a country boy he had a remarkable amount of *savoir faire*. College had taught him much. He had taken away from Hamilton the best it had to offer of culture and calm; and he could look any man in the face without fear. Moreover, tonight, fresh from his first successful day on the staff of a New York magazine, he had a kindly feeling toward the world at large, and he was looking forward with delight to his evening with Nick Deeley.

He did not talk a great deal, but he listened attentively when the voluble Mr. Hall told some old vaudeville jokes of Harrigan and Hart's that should have gone better—or so the narrator thought. He had a mania for puns; and his favorite was that atrocity of the Spanish-American war, a soliloquy beginning, "Cubee or not Cubee—that is the Key Westion!" He had told it many times before John's arrival—ever since the short war ended, in fact; but tonight he got it off again, and was thrilled when the newcomer told him he thought it one of the best things he had ever heard. Thus encouraged, the counter-jumper ran on and on; and John was sorry he had bestowed his praise upon him, since story after story deprived him of the pleasure of talking to Miss Gwynne.

He knew he should not stare at her as he did; but seldom had he seen anyone lovelier. He liked, too, the dainty way in which she ate her food, and her voice was low when she deigned to speak to him. Evidently she was a girl of great refinement, forced to earn her living. She, too, he learned, came from a country town—Quincy, Illinois; and he gathered that a little of her income had to be sent home to her mother and father.

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The big centre light over the table, with its hideous red shade, encompassed them all, and brought out the good as well as the bad points in the faces around the board. Mary Gwynne's soft, delicate skin was in marked contrast to the leather-like complexion of Mrs. Thompson; and it was obvious that Mr. Hall needed a shave. His stubble grew thickly on his chin, and dwindled away on his cheeks; and his thin graying hair was parted meticulously in the middle, the part growing wider as it went back on his head, where, when he leaned over to eat ravenously, a bald spot gleamed and shone. His detached cuffs were of celluloid, round in shape, and they were too long. He kept shooting them back, as he sopped up his gravy, stating apologetically that he knew better than to eat that way. "It's bad form, but good taste," he grinned; and everybody smiled—as they had smiled for many days at the stale joke. He would say it till the end of time, and Mrs. Thompson always followed it with the line, "Oh, say, now, Mr. Hall, you *are* a case!" It was as though they were a vaudeville team, feeding each other; though the Eckols said it was the landlady who fed *him*. And that got a rousing laugh, which pleased the German-American couple so much that they asked for second helpings of their favorite dessert. It happened to be apple strudel tonight.

John, because of his date with Nick, was the first to leave the room. He knew he would be discussed the moment he had disappeared; but he did not care. He had not paid too much attention to Miss Gwynne; he had said nothing that the others could not hear, and so there was nothing to worry about on that score. But he determined to see her again, alone, and very soon. If tongues wagged, let them wag; but this girl was too charming to sit alone evenings—if she *did* sit alone. Like most young people, he forgot to consider the possibility of a rival.

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As he walked around the corner, it suddenly occurred to him that after all a pretty girl like that couldn't be lonesome always.

III

His wheel was gleaming. Nick had touched it up in his absence, and stood proudly surveying it in the little backyard, when he came back to South Portland Avenue.

"You shouldn't have taken all that trouble," John told him.

"No trouble at all. I wanted yours to look as spruce as mine. Gosh! I'm glad we ride the same make. No jealousy!"

It was a warm, early Spring evening. The hum of the city was strange to John who had been used to the silence of little Stockton hidden away among the hills. But he loved the bang of the trolley cars on Fulton street; and as he went over the Bridge that morning, he had thought of it as a rainbow, with a pot of gold at either end.

He did not dare confess to Nick that he was timid about riding in the crowded city. He would simply keep close to him, watch his manœuvres, and take no chances. It would never do to seem a coward.

Mrs. Deeley and the plain Alice were still in the kitchen, and they came to the door to watch the preparations for John's first journey.

"Don't get run over," Nick's mother advised. She always said that every time he left the house.

"Oh, don't be silly, Ma," her son answered. "You know I never take any chances."

"But it isn't *you* we care about," put in Alice, with a ghastly attempt to be humorous. "It's the new lodger!" And she chuckled, and dodged a make-believe feint which her brother made.

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They didn't bother to put on bicycle suits; they simply put clippers on their trousers, and wore caps.

"Don't go too fast at first," John urged, as they got out on the street.

He never forgot that initial ride through the rushing thoroughfares, out to Prospect Park. They rode through Flatbush Avenue to the Plaza. A light, pleasant breeze had come up, and the long stretches of houses filled John with wonder. When they entered the scented darkness of the Park, after passing under the Arch, he thought of shadowy lanes around Stockton. Carriages lurched against the night, their yellow lamps gleaming like tigers' eyes, and he was not a little confused at the irregular turnings; but he kept bravely at Nick's diligent heels. There was a sense of exhilaration that he had not known before when he rode. Policemen were stationed at pathways every now and then, gray reminders that he was riding in the city; and other wheelmen, out on this enchanting evening, went by them in a blur. He was intent only on keeping up with Nick, though he tried to miss no moment of the magic of the night.

It seemed forever that they sailed down Coney Island Avenue, in apparently a straight line; but now they were side by side, and Nick slowed up a little.

"It'll be great in summer to take this ride," he told his companion.

"Yes; but I like it even now," John replied. "How big the city is!"

A Brooklynite always likes to hear that. He is jealous of New York, and though Nick knew that John could make no comparisons as yet, he was nevertheless happy over his exultation and praise of his native city.

"Oh, Brooklyn's all right—make no mistake about that. You'll get the fever about the town across the Bridge; but here it's more homelike. New York is rotten.

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I wouldn't live there if you paid me. I'd rather work in Brooklyn, too. I come home for lunch, you know. Save a lot that way."

"Yes; I wish I could do that; but after all it's going to be fun to poke around and find little restaurants in New York. It's such a big place that I wonder if I'll ever learn to know it."

"There you go—getting crazy about New York before you've even got acquainted with Brooklyn!" Nick said. The jealousy was coming into his tone—the deadly Brooklyn jealousy. "This is great big berg, and they can call it New York's bedroom, if they want to—we don't care. It's the city of churches, too," he went on proudly, "and Prospect Park is much finer than Central—more natural beauty, you know. And if you live in New York, just think how far you have to go before you're in Coney Island. Oh, I guess we have a lot of things they don't have over the river."

They went along in silence for awhile. John was in a dream. He loved his wheel, and he had always been a great rider; but he didn't have his handlebars as low as Nick; consequently, he didn't lean over so much—just enough to keep him from looking like a prim old maid on her cycle. He had a lower gear, too. He rode for enjoyment rather than to create a sporty impression. The novelty of riding on a boulevard like this thrilled him, and soon he was as deft as the city lad in getting out of the way of vehicles.

Presently Nick said: "Say, wouldn't it be nice to bring some girls out, as soon as the weather gets settled? I can introduce you to a couple in our church—sisters. They're crazy about riding. You'll like them."

John had hoped there would be only one, and then he could have asked Mary Gwynne. He could not tell Nick this—it might be misunderstood.

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"Why, yes, I'd like it a lot. Who are they?"

"The Miller girls—Kate and Pearl. You can have Pearl."

"Oh, I see!" laughed John. "You're sweet on Kate, eh?"

"Well, not exactly. You see, I like 'em all, John. I'm going to call you John from now on."

"That's right. And I'll call you Nick." The camaraderie of the wheel had brought about this swift intimacy. No fraternity button or Masonic order could have made them better friends. The great brotherhood of wheelmen encircled the globe!

"It'll be Spring in earnest this month, I think," Nick went on. "We'll make up a party of four just as soon as the nice weather comes."

John said nothing. If only he hadn't met Mary Gwynne that very evening! But this was the city, and he knew how speedily people came into one's life here. There was hardly time for one acquaintance when another popped up. Already he had seen more new faces in the space of a few days than he would see in Stockton in a whole year. The thought made him dizzy. It was a merry-go-round, and here he was, speeding along a road he had not known of an hour ago, with a boy of whose existence he had not been aware three days back. And they were calling each other by their first names! Yet people had said the city was cold!

IV

"There's Coney!" Nick was saying.

Like most things of which one hears a great deal, John was disappointed when he first looked upon that long row of shabby houses, outlined against a starry sky. They slowed up. He distinctly heard the boom of the

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surf; and he was conscious of a thrill, a tug at his heart. The ocean! His first view of it!

They reached the sandy stretch of beach. It was much colder here. A really sharp wind blew in; but they did not mind. The moon was coming up. The stars were spangles over the blue vault of heaven, and there was not a cloud above them anywhere. The clean breakers tumbled on the shore, for Nick had purposely led him to a desolate part of the beach. He had had the wit not to take him down that hideous paved centre street, bordered by ramshackle buildings.

He watched his new friend's ecstasy.

"You like it, don't you?" was what he said.

"Oh, it's great—wonderful!" was all John could get out.

He let him look, in silence; and John praised his name for not being garrulous. How detestable it would have been to have a talkative companion!

"'In such a night,'" John was thinking. It was a beauty that almost broke his heart; and the poet in him said a prayer of gratitude for the wonder of the world—for this little portion of it which he was now gazing upon. It was so much better to see it this way first, in half darkness, with deserted houses all around them, and scarcely a sound save the crashing of those waves on the shore. They came up in great creamy battalions, and fell back in anger and dismay; and all the while the quiet stars peered down, as they had done for thousands of years, and the moon in pale serenity crossed the limitless arch of heaven, unheedful of the little ways of man.

When they got back, it was midnight; for John had stood on the beach a long, long time, saying nothing; alone with his dreams, almost frightened in the presence of that thundering sea.

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CHAPTER IV

I

WHEN April came with little rippling showers and sudden bursts of sunlight, it seemed to John that the drab city had been washed clean; and he looked forward to a Saturday afternoon stroll through Prospect Park with Mary Gwynne with all the eagerness that only youth knows.

"Oh, don't you love it when Spring comes!" she said to him. And they drank it in together, as though they had never known another April, and might never experience one again.

John, hitherto, had always taken Spring for granted, as country people do; but here in the crowded town, he realized that it meant more than it did in the valley he had left. Cobblestones and bricks needed the fresh outpouring of the warm sun; and the flowerbeds in the Park shone with a brave radiance, as though they knew they were giving unexpected joy to thousands of pale clerks and poorer people who craved a glimpse of their delicate loveliness. The hyacinths nodded in the soft wind, the leaves above rustled rapturously; and every tulip seemed to be a cup, holding golden beauty, and pouring it out for those who came to drink.

"It's certainly lovely out here," John was saying; "and the people look as if they couldn't get enough of it. They put out their hands to warm them on the hearth of April —the first little flames are bursting forth, and their

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bodies are chill and cold after the long winter we've had."

"Say, that's rather good. You'll write poetry one of these days," Mary said.

He had not dared tell her that he hoped to do big things; that in the back of his head was always that desire to write, write, write; but the editorial work he was doing took up all his time, absorbed all his energy, and one had to live. It was his dream to do a great book some day—a novel that would speak the truth about life as he would live it; a revelation of some cross section of America; a pitiless tearing down of many barriers; a sharp, brave, incisive story which might live as a picture of the social order as he would see it and know it.

"Why am I afraid to tell her what I want to do?" he asked himself, as he walked along at her side this glowing afternoon.

Always he held in. He wanted to expand to Mary; they had become good, quiet pals, and seemed almost aloof from the other boarders in Hanson Place. But he could not bring himself to the point of telling her his ideals and dreams; she might laugh at him, or smile condescendingly. She had read a lot—she liked the finer books, and couldn't take poor little washed-out Mrs. Graham seriously. "There aren't any cavaliers in modern times," she was fond of saying; "so why waste time reading about what existed hundreds of years ago? I like stories with modern settings—things I know about myself. I'd rather read Dickens than all the Robert Louis Stevensons in the world."

That was just what John felt, at this period of his youth. The towering city of New York had an amazing effect upon his point of view. He loved the quiet pastoral beauty of Wordsworth and he clung to his Tennyson and Keats with a childlike faith in them. But he loved the more robust Browning; and he felt down within him-

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self an ache for some singer who would come along—not like the decadents of the eighteen-nineties—and sing of city streets, chant the great, lasting hymn that the miracle of man had accomplished in such energetic expressions as a New York skyscraper or a massive Brooklyn Bridge.

He found many bonds growing between himself and Mary. She, too, saw the wonder of the city; and they often laughed at the thought of people living like bees in a hive, or sleeping like lumps of sugar in tiers in all those monstrous buildings set in such unimaginative precision for miles and miles. What did it all mean? Why were people content to remain so crowded in, when the vast open spaces forever called to them? He thought of lost gardens where there was perpetual peace, and of those vast stretches of the tumbling ocean—wastelands patiently waiting for the presence of man; yet he huddled with his fellows in towns of tumult and pain, content to spend his youth in a friendless current of events. The pageant of life fascinated him. The glamour of it got into his soul; and he could see the artists of the future painting pictures of these terrible cities which were a symbol of the new spirit of the race. Writers like Frank Norris and Stephen Crane boomed a fresh, exultant note for him; and their words pounded on his heart and gave him belief in a renaissance of American literature. These were the men who would speak with a new voice, ring up the curtain on a new scene, cry out with new gestures.

It seemed as if he and Mary could never get enough of the city. This afternoon they determined to walk as far as they could; and John told himself that he was going to indulge in the extravagance of treating her to dinner at some good restaurant. They had to pay for their meals at Mrs. Thompson's, of course, whether they ate them or not; and to remain purposely away was a

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wild indulgence that he reveled in. He had sold a poem that morning for five dollars, and every penny of it should go for this little feast. But Mary might never know that her soup was the first line of his verses, and dessert and coffee the last.

"You're different from the young men one meets," she said, as they strolled along. "There's something about you that—I can't explain it; but you're gentler. Nick Deeley, now—what is the bond between you two? I should think you would see nothing at all in him."

"Oh, but I do." John was quick to come to Nick's rescue. "He's wild, and harum-scarum, and all that; but you know opposites always attract, and I suppose that's the reason he and I get along so well together. I was wondering this morning why you—seemed to care —about me?" He hadn't meant to say it; but it was out, and he was not ashamed. He had scarcely ever been so frank with a girl.

She did not answer at once. She looked ahead of her —they were in a sequestered part of the Park now, and the early green of the grass seemed to hold her.

"We girls are mighty lonely," she told him, finally. But she didn't look at him. Her eyes were far off, and there was a strange little note in her voice, as if it made her ache to say what she was going to say: "You boys can get out whenever you want to; if no one comes to take us girls, we sit in our rooms and sew, or try to read. We can't just jump on a trolley or a wheel and spin out to Coney Island. You have no idea how we envy you your rich freedom, and women always wonder if men know what they've got. Oh, the lonely dinners I've had in Hanson Place! Until you came, sometimes I thought I couldn't stand it. When Mr. Hall picks his teeth and Mrs. Graham simpers, I almost go out of my head and want to tell them both how much I despise them! Is

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that silly? Why should I feel that way? They're lonesome, too. I'm no better than they are."

"Yes, you are!" he cried. "That's just where life is so cruel. You've got refinement, and courage, and a sense of beauty—and beauty of your own; yet you're tied down with a lot of older people who can't talk to you about a thing you want to talk about. *You* shouldn't have to work, Mary! You're too good to be in an office, tied up all day, and coming home weary at night. It isn't fair. That's what a man is put in this world to do—not a young, pretty girl like you."

"But what is one to do? I've got to live—just as you've got to live. It's the monotony that's killing me. There are nineteen roses on the border of the wall paper in my room. I count them every time I go to bed, and again when I wake up. I wish sometimes I'd never seen them. And think how many others before me have looked at them!" She tried to laugh. "And there's a stain on the third drawer of my chiffonier that I'll never be able to get out. It's exactly four inches from the left-hand side." She laughed. "There were evenings last winter when I thought I couldn't stand that room any more; but Mrs. Thompson *is* good-hearted; and after all, it's better than I could find elsewhere, at the price. I think you've got the better arrangement—living in one house and taking your meals in another. There again is the man's luck."

"Luck? Do you suppose I am altogether happy, Mary? Not at all!" He had youth's passion for thinking itself miserable. "I have very little to live on—I can't save a cent, I assure you; but I do love my work, and I—"

"Then you're not going to take me anywhere to dinner tonight—except back to Hanson Place," she broke in.

In that moment he knew she cared for him. Only a girl who cared ever tried to make a man economize. He

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felt a thrill run up his spine, and something tugged at his heart. In the warmth of the Spring afternoon, he was supremely happy.

"Oh, but I can well afford it, Mary. I sold a poem this morning."

She turned and stared at him.

"That's it—that's why you're different! I knew it, oh, I knew it! You're a poet. You talk like one, you act like one—not that I've ever met one before; but I just knew a poet would be nice! Say it to me—what you sold this morning, I mean." There was eagerness in her voice. "To think that I would know a really truly man of letters!" She gazed at him admiringly; and he flushed crimson.

"I'm sorry I told you, Mary. I never like to speak of what I'm trying to do."

"Why? If you have a sympathetic listener, I should think it would be wonderful to tell of your dreams. You must promise to show me all you write—mother used to say I was a good critic, and she always read only the books I told her to."

A terrible thought came to John. "Say," he got out, "you won't tell anyone in Hanson Place, will you, Mary?"

She burst out laughing.

"Imagine their excitement!" she said. "You'd be done for with Mrs. Graham, in a jiffy! She loves romance so, you know, and she'd pounce upon you all the time—and maybe you'd be walking out with her, instead of me!"

"Oh, Mary! Don't make fun, I can't stand it." Was it going to be with her, after all, as it had been with his sister Ethel? Was this only another disappointment, added to the many he had known, at home and in college? Why did the sensitive artist always have to run up against an opaque world, no matter where he went? But he was

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doing Mary a great injustice. She was comprehending; she would read him aright. He could be frank with her. What a joy it was going to be to take his manuscripts to her, and have her pass judgment on what he had done!

They sat on a bench for an hour, and the world around them was well lost.

"You must write something great one of these days," she was saying. "Just think, the time will come when I can look back, and say to everyone, 'I knew him when —well, when he was just a nobody, like me! We ate our simple meals together in a Brooklyn boarding-house; and now look at John Darrow!' I tell you, I'll always be proud of this period of our friendship."

"Why, you're wonderful! But you mustn't think I'll ever get to be famous. I have so little time to write. I'm always reading what other people write."

She turned and looked him straight in the eyes. "But you must *find* the time—*make* it."

"That sounds simple; but how can I?"

"Do you want to write more than you want to do anything else in the world—more than you want to eat your dinner, for instance?"

"Of course."

"Then you will. If I wanted to go on the stage, you can bet I'd find a way."

"Thank God you don't! They say it's an awful career for a girl."

"Oh, they say everything is awful that you want to do most! I don't believe them. And who are *they,* anyhow? I used to wonder, as a child. I'm still wondering."

"But you're only a child yet," John couldn't help saying, looking at her wide blue eyes, and her light hair that was being lifted from her temples by the gentle April wind. She had taken off her hat—"to get a spirit-

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ual bath," she said. The sun must have been jealous of that gold of her head.

"Maybe I look like one, seem like one; but oh, John Darrow, I'm a woman, sadly earning her living; and I tell you that working in an office, bending over a typewriter, makes us old before our time. But let's talk of you, not me. To think I've actually met a writer-man!"

"And to think I've met someone with whom I can talk about my work! You have no idea how hard it is to keep one's guilty secret all the time! Why are we always afraid of what the world will say about us?"

"Yes, why, why? We're all such slaves, mentally and physically. Maybe some day we'll escape—somewhere."

"Do you want to escape?"

"Of course I do. If I thought that office was to be my destiny, I'd go mad. The men are so dull—'Yours of even date to hand and contents noted!' Oh, to think how many times I put that down in little curly-cues!" She lifted her right hand and made strange symbols on the air, and laughed, and then pouted. "I've got so I can do it in my sleep, John Darrow. They never know how they bore me; they just think of me as a blonde machine."

"How can they?" He took her in again, rapturously.

"They haven't any imagination. How few people have. Won't you let me type your poems for you? I'll do it, oh, so neatly; and I'll know how to indent them, and be smart enough to put capitals at the beginning of every line!"

"If you can read my wretched writing, I'd love nothing better than to have you do it for me. I can scarcely find the letters even yet on a typewriter."

"You mustn't be bothered with such details. If you're going to be a great artist, you've got to be spared the drudgery of preparing your manuscripts for the printer.

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If only I can be of some service to you, John Darrow. What fun it's going to be! Say me your latest verses—please. Don't get modest, now, and say you can't remember them."

He had never done it before; he didn't quite know how he did it now. But somehow it seemed perfectly natural to be sitting here, in the warm April afternoon, with her beside him, and that which had just come out of his heart coming now from his lips. It was a sonnet—immature, perhaps, but technically quite correct. As the formal lines were said to her, Mary's face glowed. John Darrow had a sympathetic, resonant voice, and he had always loved to read poetry aloud. But his own—there had never been anyone to whom he could recite it, and this further expression of himself, this interpreting himself, as it were, not only to his inmost self but to another, brought an exquisite joy to him. It was not the egotist speaking; it was the humble dreamer, trying to tell a kindred spirit some little of what went on in his soul.

"Oh, John, it is wonderful!" Mary cried, when he had paused at the ringing last line. "How *does* one do it?"

"It is nothing, Mary—nothing at all; but I swear it's the best I can do—yet. Keep on believing in me. You don't know what that means to a fellow who's trying to work his way up."

"I *do* believe in you. I'm—I'm not worthy to be your friend. To think that those others in Hanson Place don't know who is among them! Well, they'll learn some day—when you've gone away."

"Gone away? I'll never go—as long as you're there."

"Oh, everyone goes away, sooner or later. A boarding-house is just a springboard. How glad you'll be when you take the plunge into the sea of that city across the river!"

"Brooklyn's good enough for me—yet awhile." He

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did not like the thought of being very far away from her now. "Maybe—who knows—we'll both go over there—together."

"John Darrow, don't be foolish. You will move on to finer things, with great people; and Hanson Place will be one of the things you'll forget in a year or two. I know. I can sense it in you. But always I want you to remember one thing: 'To thine own self be true.' It's so easy to be false to our gifts. If I only had one, to prove to you what I would do with it!"

"You have many gifts, Mary. You have the greatest of all gifts—the gift of understanding."

"Oh, I hope that's true, John Darrow!" she said, looking off at the green turf, where some children were playing against a rich background of trees.

Long after dark, they made their way to a little German place which they found quite by accident—as most of the best things in life are usually discovered—and talked until eleven o'clock, with a little Rhine wine helping to make their gay tongues wag.

When they left, and took a trolley home, he thought that two stars had dropped from heaven and become, through some miracle, the eyes of Mary Gwynne.

II

On many a warm summer evening, Nick and John wheeled down to the Island, or elsewhere, with thousands of others; and once or twice they packed what little they needed, and made a century run down on Long Island, stopping overnight, and getting back to Brooklyn very late Sunday, tired but happy.

"Ain't you going to take Alice with you?" Mrs. Deeley sometimes said to Nick, as the two young men started for a spin.

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Poor, plain Alice! They didn't want her; but once in awhile they would have to let her tag along, and Nick was cross with her when she got out of breath on a hill. Few fellows like to have their sister trailing on behind when they go for a jaunt; and Nick was not good at hiding his feelings. But mercifully for him, there was always so much housework to be done that it was seldom indeed the Cinderella of South Portland Avenue could get away.

John, to atone for their seeming selfishness, used to take her to Fischer's drug-store of an evening and buy her soda or a plate of ice-cream. Then they would walk around into South Oxford street, where, through the strange processes of a big city, a rather fashionable neighborhood rubbed elbows with a perfectly plain one. But they liked the look of the houses set on terraces there; and Fulton street, despite the thundering Elevated road, (or perhaps because of it) never lost its fascination for John. The endless rows of shops held magic for him; and he loved trolley rides, particularly when he could jump on a car and not know just where it was going. Often he rode to the end of the line, kept his seat, paid another fare and came back without changing his position.

It was his great regret that Mary Gwynne had no wheel—she couldn't afford one, and she had never learned how to ride. He hated to leave her on those first delicious June nights; and he would delay his going until the last moment, keeping the impetuous Nick waiting around the corner, while he and Mary dallied over their dessert in the basement dining-room on Hanson Place.

"You're not getting stuck on a girl so soon, I hope," Nick said to him one night when they rode through the moonlight on their way to the Island, and he had been

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kept waiting longer than usual. "Say, there are plenty of girls in the world, and you mustn't tie yourself to any one in particular right away."

He liked to give advice to the country boy. Not that he wished to seem superior; but he had a smug complacency about things in general, and if he had ever stopped to analyze his feelings, he would have had to admit that he rather enjoyed his position as mentor to John. He had lived in Brooklyn all his life—gone to public school there, and then had to go to work, without even a high-school education. He was conscious of John's better training of the mind—he secretly envied him his college days, his finer equipment to face the world; but he felt that he himself had far more general knowledge, a wisdom that could not be acquired in any school, a business acumen that would get him somewhere. And as for girls—well, he knew all there was to know about them. He had few friends of his own sex, and as he and his sister had little in common, he began to lean on John at once. He wanted to be well read, well informed; but he would never take the trouble to dig out of a book. Magazines were different; and the Sunday comic sections made him roar with mirth. He never remembered an author's name ten minutes after he had read a story; but he had the kind of mind that can follow four or five serials at once and never lose the thread of the various plots. He loved vaudeville, and whenever a magician wanted someone to step from the audience to see if his hands were securely bound, Nick invariably went forward, perfectly self-possessed. He had even allowed himself to be hypnotized once; but the roars of laughter that greeted him when he came to caused him to believe he had been made ridiculous, and he never tried it again. He was always curious as to the individual identity of a team of singing and dancing artists,

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and would not rest until he had tried to figure out which was Rooney and which Duffy.

John didn't like the word "stuck" as applied to Mary. But he couldn't quarrel with Nick. He liked him tremendously—his self-assurance fascinated him, and he found himself trying to copy his ways, endeavoring to emulate that Brooklyn *savoir faire* he so much envied. To be casual with strangers was the hardest thing he had to learn. He had been so in the habit, all his life, of speaking to anyone, anywhere, that he could not readily adjust himself to the agate coldness of the city. Nick had a nonchalant way with him, and he could dismiss intruders of the road quickly and thoroughly, whereas John never knew how to get rid of anyone. Those who called, for instance, at the office of the *Banner,* found him affable and willing to give up all his time to them, answering their most commonplace questions with extreme politeness; and Anastasia Morgan, after hearing one of his conversations in the ante-room as she swept by, was convinced she had picked a diplomatic assistant editor, and told Caleb Buncey so.

As Nick and John slipped through the dark on this June evening, the latter felt that Nick had found out how interested he was becoming in Mary Gwynne, and there came a silence between them. The gravel beneath their wheels clicked like raindrops on a window-pane, and now and then another cyclist whizzed by them, scooting cleverly in and out of the long train of riders, leaning far over his handlebars, and was soon lost in the crowd ahead. The little lamps, like thousands of glow-worms, twinkled all around them. Finally, near Bensonhurst, they turned off the formal path, and went to sit under a big elm-tree on a side road, and enjoy the fragrance and beauty of the night.

"Damn it, my front tire's getting flat," Nick com-

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plained, as they dropped their wheels on the grass, and looked them over for possible injury, putting out their lamps to save oil. He bent down, after removing his coat, and pumped up the refractory tire in a jiffy. He was quick of movement—he did everything in a hurry—and John, who had thrown himself on the ground, his arms under his head, was watching his lithe body busy at its task over the bicycle. He wished he had been blessed with those iron muscles, and wondered if a few months at the Y. M. C. A. gymnasium would put new life into his sinews. But no, he was meant for a sedentary life, and though he enjoyed these rides, he was one of those who never seem to need exercise. He was completely happy at his desk, or in his rooms reading.

"Girls are all right—in their place," said Nick, apropos of nothing at all, as he finished and came and fell down beside John, puffing at a cigarette. "Don't get too interested in one is my motto; then they have nothing on you. I like 'em all—yes, every darned one of 'em," he rambled on. "How would you like a spin some night with the Miller girls I was speaking of? You always seem to be tied up, though; and when you're not reading, you're staying late over at Mrs. Thompson's. What do you say, John?"

"It would be fine, I think," his friend answered. "You've spoken of it several times."

"Well, let's make it tomorrow, then," the impetuous Nick suggested.

"I'm not sure of tomorrow," John hedged. He wanted to spend that evening with Mary. "But I could make it next week." He knew she was going out to Illinois then, for a brief vacation.

"Oh, you're beginning to talk like a New Yorker—always dated up ahead. Why don't you keep your time free, like the rest of us?"

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"I've got some work to do—I have to read manuscripts home sometimes, you know, Nick; and if I'm ever to get ahead I'll have to give up lots of fun, I'm afraid."

"Oh, we're only young once! What's the use of shutting yourself up so much in your room, and reading those darned stories?"

"Well, I earn my living reading those darned stories," John smiled. "That's the main reason I have to be interested in them. I'm kept pretty busy all day at mechanical things—I have to see callers, and that takes up a lot of time; and I have to write editorials—and verses," the confession slipped out. He had never meant to tell him he was a poet—or tried to be one.

"Verses?" Nick seized upon the very word he had feared he would.

"Yes, just rhymes, Nick." John was blushing in the dark, as he had with Mary Gwynne. He couldn't get over this foolish self-consciousness, and he knew he must, sooner or later.

"What kind of rhymes?" the literal-minded Nick wanted to know. "Mother Goose stuff?"

At first John thought he was making fun of him; then he realized he was absolutely serious, and using the only phrase he knew in connection with the word "rhyme." John seized upon his ignorance as a way out.

"Yes, exactly," he cried.

"Say one for me," Nick commanded.

"Oh, I never remember them—I forget them as soon as I put them down on paper," the other apologized.

"Come, now, how could a fellow forget his own stuff? Go on, tell me one. I want to see how much of a poet you are."

John was terrified.

"Honestly, I can't say a single one of them."

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"Are they coming out in the *Banner?* I'll watch for 'em if they are."

Here was a new dread. Nick would read the paper, and see his emotional poetry, his flowery editorials, and make fun of him. He had not counted on that. A chill came over him, despite the warmth of the evening. The girls were forgotten; and John brought them back into the talk, knowing he could thus divert the insistent Nick.

"And shall we make it Monday night with the Miller sisters?" he asked. It sounded like a vaudeville team, put that way.

What were intangible verses when tangible girls were at hand!

"You bet!" Nick replied. "I'll get hold of 'em tomorrow, and make the date. You'll like Pearl. She's a corker. Good voice, too. . . . Like the girls, John? I'll bet you do—if you're a poet. But say, you don't look like one!"

He couldn't help being glad of that, for the decadents of that period, with their long hair and velvet knickerbockers, did not appeal to him. He read them all—Yeats, Le Gallienne, Dowson, Wilde, Lionel Johnson, and he caught their glamour and was fascinated by their luxuriant singing. He turned away from Aubrey Beardsley; and sometimes wondered how the same years, and the same land, could produce both him and Stephen Phillips. The resounding blank verse of the latter, his sombre, melting lines kept ringing in his head, and his little leather-bound copy of "Marpessa" was one of his most cherished possessions. Would he ever be able to put a single line on paper that would be comparable to these? That was the stern stuff of which poetry should be made. John liked an iron note in any song, though he was catholic enough in his tastes not to dismiss with a shrug the first beautiful pipings of an authentic singer

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like Le Gallienne. Here was precious metal, too; and always he was conscious that the young author of "The Bookbills of Narcissus" was escaping the contamination of those roisterers and revelers of London who were in powerful revolt against a mid-Victorian emptiness, and longed to put danger and delight into their work. They were worshippers of the vast English metropolis, in contrast to scented country lanes; and John, first discerning the poetry in all great cities, shared this common ecstasy with them. So far he went with them—no farther. He, too, must chant the praises of the town he was to know so well. Already Brooklyn Bridge was a harp to him with ten thousand strings; and he had stood on that windy porch, that dizzy height, and watched for hours the beauty of the river below him, and wondered at the secret dreams and desires of the endless lines of people who passed him. He never seemed to tire of people—all sorts of people; and though he loved Nature in all her manifestations, he loved human nature more. "Mountains and mountains never meet, but the sons of mothers do," he recalled an old Spanish proverb; and so these busy hives of New York and Brooklyn would be nothing, were it not for the link that held them together, over which thousands passed and repassed every hour. Houses, houses! how wonderful they were! But it was the people under those tangled roofs that thrilled him, after all.

"I'm glad you think I don't look like those long-haired barbarians over in England!" John said to Nick.

"If you did, I'd punch your face in!" the frank young Brooklynite answered. "I'll bet you had lots of love affairs up there in Stockton? Come, now, didn't you?"

"Oh, I had a few flirtations—why shouldn't I?" John laughed.

"You have to be in love before you can write decent

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poetry." was Nick's comment, uttered as though he were an oracle. He looked off down the moonlit road. There was silence for a moment. John didn't relish his getting back so definitely to the subject of poetry. Then, "Funny thing—this love," Nick went on. He leaned back again, his head resting in his two clasped hands, one leg crossed, swinging over the other, his cigarette dangling from his lips as usual. "It's awfully easy for us men, but it's tough on a girl." He puffed some more, and the ashes dropped on his tie; but he didn't seem to heed. John kept perfectly still. He wondered what was coming.

"Take Alice, for instance," her brother continued. "Strange, but she never seems to catch a man. I wonder why? She likes 'em—I know that; I've seen her look around in church. She got an awful crush on the minister once—a young chap who was here a couple of years ago. Good looking, too. All the girls fell for him. But he got out of Brooklyn—everybody worth while seems to go away, over that damned river there—" he nodded vaguely to indicate the Bridge.

"Maybe if Alice had more time she could meet lots of men."

"She made friends with the postman not long ago," Nick laughed. "Not such a bad chap; but Ma would want her to aim higher."

"The postman!" John couldn't help revealing his surprise.

"Yes. No class. But he wears trousers. Maybe poor Alice is getting desperate!" Only a brother could have put it that way.

"She's too young for that," John came to the girl's rescue. "Do you think she wants to marry?"

"Of course. Every girl does—but not every fellow."

John wondered at his sophistication. "Oh!" was all he said. "Is that so? And why not?"

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Nick dug his heel into the ground, and half sat up. His cigarette drooped from one corner of his mouth, and moved up and down as he talked. It seemed part of him. "A man's life is different from a woman's. Men don't have to marry."

"But how about children? I thought most men wanted to be fathers, just as all women want to be mothers."

"Oh, stuff and nonsense! That may be so in the country—even in the suburbs. It ain't so in big cities." Nick was indeed oracular tonight. "You see, life in cities is different, John." He gazed out once more at the path where the cyclists were forever whirling by, each with his or her ambitions and dreams. "Look how many of us there are in Brooklyn—and this is only *one* city! How can you expect every one of those people to be alike?"

"Not alike—not exactly; but surely the same in their fundamental feelings and desires," John insisted. "'And I shall bear you passionate children,'" he quoted from "Marpessa," scarcely knowing he had done so.

Nick caught the rhythm of the line. "Something of yours?" he said.

"Hardly," John answered, smiling under cover of the darkness. "But that's what every woman feels when she falls in love, Nick. It's what makes this old world bounce round. Surely *you* want to marry, just as I do, and have children, and a real home of your own?"

"Oh, I'm not so sure!" the puzzling Nick replied. "I'm perfectly happy as I am. Gee! I love my freedom more than anything else. I'd hate to be tied for life to some woman's apron-strings. Couldn't stand it. Could you, now?"

"Of course I could! We're all tied, more or less, to someone, or something. As long as we have to be chained,

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I'd rather it would be to a woman I'd picked out myself. We all ought to marry; and even if we haven't got much to start on, I suppose it's best to take the plunge early in life."

"And get it over with!" laughed Nick.

"Oh, you're impossible!" John said. "But there's no use arguing about marriage. When the right one comes along a fellow knows it. All the advice in the world—and the oldest vice is advice!—won't stop him from taking his own chance. He thinks things will be different—with him. That's Nature's trick, to make us all go the same way."

"Oh! So you do admit there's a trick in it somewhere?" Nick was jubilant at catching his friend.

"That's what the world calls it; but the individual never admits it," John wriggled out.

"But it *is* a trick, just the same. Stupid business, this marrying game. Keep out of it, John, is my advice to you. Hope you're not thinking of skipping off and making a fool of yourself already?"

"Hardly," John laughed. Yet Mary's face came out of the dark, and he wondered about himself—and her.

They did not speak for a long time. Nick had fallen back again on the grass, his head propped as before, his eyes shut. Their wheels looked like great silver coins tossed carelessly on the velvet turf. The whirr of the passersby never ceased. And John's thoughts went buzzing on, too. Whither was he drifting, in this maze of the city? Where did that path lead? To the sea, the passionate, plunging sea! But also it led back to the workaday world, the eternal grind and glitter and loneliness of the city—that trap which caught them all, these poor creatures ensnared forever on her iron heart.

An hour hurried on. Then Nick's voice roused him.

"Want to start home?" he asked.

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"Might as well," John answered.

And soon they were on their way, part of that twinkling crowd, bending forward, peering ahead, just a little sad for all their youth, since the years, like their wheels, were speeding on.

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CHAPTER V

I

CALEB BUNCEY had kept the proofs of the July issue of the *Banner* out of John's sight. Mrs. Morgan had told him to do so; and when the first copies still smelling deliciously of printer's ink came up to the editorial rooms, John knew why.

The editorial and poem he had written with such care were signed Anastasia Morgan.

He was standing at his desk when a copy with a vivid cover was put before him. This was the issue in which his first work, since he joined the staff, was to appear. His eye went mechanically to the table of contents; but he did not see his own name. At first he thought there must be some error. It never occurred to him that, purposely, his signature had been omitted.

From his little cage, Caleb Buncey was watching him; but John did not know that. When he realized the meaning behind the omission, a slight mist came before his eyes; but very manfully, very determinedly, he caused it to vanish. This would never do. He mustn't turn a complete fool because he was working on a ladies' journal! His pride was hurt; but even stronger was the feeling of resentment deep down within that nothing had been said to him; that this course had been taken without his once having been consulted. If Mrs. Morgan had only told him, he would have been the first to understand.

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But this chicanery—well, it was hardly an atmosphere he cared to breathe. What was he to do? What was the intention of the proprietor henceforth?

He thought it over calmly. He had come here to try to make a name for himself; to give his best to the *Banner*. For three solid months he had thought of nothing except the paper—he had even sacrificed his evenings to write and rewrite editorials, go over old manuscripts long in the safe, and whip them into publishable shape. Mrs. Morgan, satisfied with his editorial judgment, had remained uptown in her Lexington Avenue nest; but she had telephoned him every day or so, to make sure that nothing happened of which she was not aware. Her finger was forever on the pulse of her periodical, and Caleb Buncey was a Cerberus whose eyes never closed. He had been instructed to watch John, to check him up on every editorial movement, and report any thoughtless extravagance immediately. But the young assistant, innocent of any such conniving and plotting, went quietly about his duties. All the enthusiasm he had went into the building up of the editorial page; any grace of style which was his was used to embellish that special department; and now, if the readers of the *Banner* were to see and recognize a literary growth in the work of Mrs. Morgan, he was not one to envy her this added prestige, but to glory in the fact that he had made possible the sudden metamorphosis. He could hold his peace, though the manner in which things had turned out was not what he had expected. Was this a part of the cruelty and injustice of the great city? Was this how youth's hopes were wrecked, suddenly and completely? He remembered the poor fellow he had seen beaten on Forty-second street; but wasn't it just as terrible to be spiritually bruised and wounded?

Then his sense of humor came to his rescue. After

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all, Nick the inquisitive would never find his rhymes in the *Banner,* search though he might! Delightful consolation! He smiled at the thought, and determined that he would not say a word to Mrs. Morgan, nor to Caleb Buncey. They should never be given the satisfaction of knowing how hurt he was.

It was his first compromise with life; but it was not to be his last.

II

Sometimes, on Sunday mornings, Nick asked John to stay at their house for breakfast. This enabled the young editor to get a little extra sleep, as the Hanson Place dining-room closed promptly at nine-thirty; and John enjoyed and appreciated the extra hour of rest. Mrs. Deeley was glad enough to have him, and so was Alice. As for old Tom Deeley, he came down to the basement as always upon such special occasions and was happy to have an augmented audience when he held forth about the general debility of the world and of himself.

He was one of those invalids who revel in their symptoms. He fetched a mysterious medicine bottle to the table, and stirred some of its dark contents in a glass, and complained of how little good it was doing him; but the doctor had told him to take it, and what was the use of paying a physician unless you followed his instructions, painful as it might be to do so. He actually enjoyed the diet prescribed for him—it gave his case a thrilling importance; and when the others ate heartily of pancakes, he sat back in mute envy, then told them how fortunate they were, and hoped when they were his age they would not have to endure such a purgatory as his. "Only a half a cup o' coffee now—and that so weak it don't taste like anything but slops," he wailed, in his high, thin voice. And he drew conspicuous atten-

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tion to the pitiful portion in his porridge dish, which he pretended to dislike exceedingly. John always had the feeling that afterwards, upstairs, he indulged in secret banquets, and thus was able to watch the others consume quantities of delicacies of which he was deprived. No one ever knew exactly what was the matter with him.

Old Deeley was forever pressing another batch of pancakes upon one. "Take some more," he insisted—as if one could go on forever eating them. John wondered why it is that people imagine you can partake indefinitely of griddle-cakes. Surely second and third portions of eggs and meat are never so insistently urged upon us. "And butter 'em while they're hot," was another of old Deeley's admonitions; and if John, fully satisfied, protested that he could touch nothing more, old Deeley would express his wonder, murmur something about "When I was your age I could put away twenty cakes or over," and with a wry face, would take to stirring his crimson medicine and look greedily at the plethora of cakes upon the table.

The dining-room was stuffy, with lemon-colored woodwork and a figured wallpaper that was fly-specked, and partly concealed also by a lithograph of a dead fish and a dead bird. In striking contrast to the latter, a canary twittered in the window, and immediately after Mr. Deeley's advent, the floor was always littered with the Sunday papers—he would never have a New York one in the house, but only those which were printed, published and edited in Brooklyn. It infuriated him to see John immersed in the *Times* or *Herald* or *Sun*. "Showing off," he thought it; and was frank enough to say so.

Mrs. Deeley always stepped in as peacemaker. "Hush, Tom," she warned her husband. "Mr. Darrow can read whatever he likes, you know. You ain't got the right to tell him what he should or shouldn't subscribe to."

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"'Course not," fussed the querulous old man, "but I can't see any reason for wastin' time on these fancy sheets, when what we have in Brooklyn is good enough for anybody."

John merely laughed good-naturedly, and Nick winked at him. He couldn't tell them that he wanted to broaden his horizon, enlarge his point of view; and if he couldn't get about in New York as frequently as he desired, being tied to a desk, the next best thing was to read the papers printed there. He tried to make it clear that he had always done so. The New York *Times* came to Stockton regularly, so this was no innovation on his part.

"Why didn't you take the *Eagle* up there?" Deeley wanted to know. "It's a fine paper—good as any in the country. Great editorials, good features."

"Well, you see, we all felt—" John stumbled. He didn't like to say New York seemed more important than Brooklyn. "Why, we couldn't afford two newspapers, Mr. Deeley." And he knew the honesty of this reply would win the old man.

"Humph! but if it had been me, I'd have taken the *Eagle,* and let the *Times* go to pot. However—" His voice trailed off, as it had a way of doing, and again he stirred his medicine, pouted, dramatized his illness, by coughing loudly, fooling no one but himself, and disappeared to the backyard, if it was warm enough, with many rustlings of his beloved *Eagle,* or went heavily upstairs.

On this particular Sunday morning, John had determined that he must take to his room immediately after the late breakfast and write something for the *Banner.* Mrs. Morgan had asked him to get an article ready by Monday, and he hadn't begun it yet. So he went quietly to the second floor, sat down at the desk he had improvised, and began to scribble at top speed. A delightful

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breeze was blowing in the window, and all the books he loved best were looking down at him. A Sabbath stillness was over the city. Once in a while he could hear a church chime ringing, and then the tinkle of a bicycle bell would come to him, ever so faintly. He would rather have been out on his wheel, or sitting on the stoop with Mary, than here, writing.

"What are you doing, John?"

It was Nick's voice in the hall; and he pushed the door open and looked in, an hour or so later.

"Got to get something done for the *Banner.*"

"Oh! Sorry I disturbed you. But I never saw those verses of yours—rhymes, you called 'em. Writing some now?"

"No; only a lot of plain prose today!"

"Well, good luck." Nick was indifferent about the method of producing literature. A finished serial was all he was interested in. "Don't suppose you'd take a spin with me this afternoon?"

"Couldn't. Got to get this done without fail."

"We've got it fixed up for tomorrow night with the Miller girls, you know. Don't forget, old man." And Nick went whistling down the hall.

John heard him in the yard below, getting his wheel ready. He was always tinkering with it, finding some new polish which was better than the last, and rubbing the nickel bars and spokes until they twinkled in the sun.

Soon a complete silence settled over the little house. Mrs. Deeley and Alice had long since gone to church, and old Tom Deeley had probably gone back to bed; for there wasn't a footfall overhead.

John was never happier than when he really got to writing. He forgot where he was, and nothing mattered. The editorial wrote itself; and then, through that miracle known only to poets, a line of verse flashed in his brain

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and he put it on paper in a second. Then its mate followed swiftly; and before he knew it a sonnet was before him—the best thing he had ever written. Where had it come from? It was as though an angel had entered that little room and talked to him for an hour. He glowed as he read those words, so magically before him. What was the mysterious force that had propelled his hand, that took him into another world? What had he ever done to deserve this sense of ecstasy?

Like all writers, his first impulse, on finishing the poem, was to read it to someone; and he determined to dash around the corner and show it to Mary Gwynne; but before he had time to get out of his chair, he heard soft footsteps in the hall, and Mrs. Deeley put her head in the door and was looking at him before he was aware of her presence.

"Writing—on Sunday?" she said. "Shame on you, Mr. Darrow!"

He got up. Thank heaven, the sonnet was finished, for her words brought him back with a thud to his real surroundings.

She wore a purple bonnet and black lace mitts, and her limp Bible was clutched between the stiff fingers of both hands. An accusing figure! Alice loomed in the background, in a gown of polka-dot, and a round straw hat with a feather in it that stood straight up, in defiance. It was a most unbecoming hat, which hardened the poor girl's face and somehow brought out all her freckles. Only a pretty girl should and could have worn it.

" 'The better the day, the better the deed,' Ma," John heard her saying. "And we prayed for him, you know." She smiled a sickly smile, and had that self-conscious look of the sanctimonious which is so distasteful to the ardent sinner.

"Oh, thank you for that," John laughed. "It was

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mighty good of you to remember me in your prayers. I guess I need praying for."

They took him literally. "I guess you do, if you write on Sundays," Mrs. Deeley flamed; and there was a little light in her eyes—a light of fanatacism which John had never observed before. But then he had never happened to see her immediately after church. She was filled with the fire of the sermon she had heard, the words against Sabbath-breaking and dancing. "You and Nick both ought to be ashamed of yourselves—he off wheeling, and you sitting here writing."

He was surprised at her sharp tone. She had never been like this before. Was she trying to "convert" him? They were both well in the room now, and of course he was asking them to sit down.

"Oh, no, thanks," Mrs. Deeley said. "We've got work to do—but *necessary* work. You'll never have any luck, Mr. Darrow, if you break the Lord's day in this manner!"

"I'm sorry," was all he could get out. Then both of them disappeared into the hall again. He heard Mrs. Deeley muttering something about his being a bad influence over Nick, and what a crime it was that young men nowadays behaved as they did, and . . . But he could catch no more; and he turned to the window, sick at heart. Who were they, to criticise him? They had never done it before; why had they begun now? He realized for the first time how far apart he was from this little household; and if religion was to be dragged in, it would be the end of it all for him. He wanted to get over to New York, anyhow. Here was a good chance to escape. He was under no obligation to stay in South Portland Avenue—none at all. There were cheap places to be found in New York; and it would be far more convenient for him. Yes! this life was over.

But there was Mary! Hanson Place was another mat-

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ter. And there was Nick, and their frequent bicycle rides. Well, he could come over and call every now and again; Brooklyn was accessible, after all.

He would tell Mrs. Deeley next week that he couldn't stay—make any excuse to get away. Perhaps it was a dispensation of Providence, after all. Things worked out all right, if one was right himself; and he quoted *Hamlet* —and Mary—as he gathered up his papers, "To thine own self be true, and it shall follow as the night the day," and got fresh courage. There came a time when you had to take a stand. He was poles apart from Mrs. Deeley and her strict, stupid ways. He must get into a bigger circle.

III

When Monday morning came, John hadn't the courage to tell Mrs. Deeley he thought of making a change. Her face looked pitifully drab in the early-morning light when he encountered her in the hall on his way over to breakfast. And he heard Nick singing in his room. It would be hard to break away, after all. They had all been so kind to him.

He had sat on the stoop all the previous evening with Mary, and told her a little of what had happened in the other house. They could see, from where they sat, the huddled forms of Mrs. Deeley and Alice, also out on their wooden steps for the air; and they looked pathetic in the twilight. It had come over John then how seldom it was that poor Alice had a masculine caller in all the months he had been with the family; and he remembered how her face had brightened when, on those few occasions, he had taken her around to a soda-fountain and bought her a drink, and carried a brick of ice-cream home to her mother. He hadn't realized then how

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lonely she was. He remembered what Nick had told him about the postman.

What did she think of as she sat there on the steps, the only warmth against her mother's arm? There are many families like this, where Nature, in all unkindness, has given everything to the males, and nothing to the females. Nick was forever off on a spree, debonair and cheerful, attractive to the opposite sex, getting back often just in time for bed, and with always a tale to tell of some escapade or adventure. His sister had been quietly at home all the time with her mother and father. No one had asked her out; and day followed day in dreary monotony—a perpetual round of dishwashing, dish-drying, bedmaking and the emptying of slops. She did a little sewing, too, to piece in the tedious hours of the afternoon, when the boys were absent; and sometimes she would walk out to the Park—alone—and look enviously at the nurses with their pretty babies, and wonder if she would ever have one of her own.

It was strange that he should be thinking these things, sitting there now by Mary's side. Wasn't it sufficient that *he* was happy? Why should he care so deeply when the possible sufferings of others were involved? Yet always he had been that way, experiencing a vicarious grief when he saw some wounded animal, some tragic face among all those that passed before him. He did not analyze his emotions, but the fact that he had them accounted for his desperate interest in everyone he met, and, of course, for the poetry that constantly bubbled up within him, crying out for expression.

"I'm going away tomorrow," Mary was telling him, and her voice brought him back. "Will you miss me, John?"

"Miss you? I should say so!" he answered, and looked up at her, forgetting everything for the moment, save

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the light in her eyes. How dull the house would be without her, only Mr. Hall's flat jokes sprinkling the meal hours, and forlorn Mrs. Graham picking at her food, like a little bird, and the Eckols greedily demanding this and that, and harassed Mrs. Thompson scolding the colored servants, and the next day breaking in a new maid.

Still, there would be the nightly rides with Nick—but they would seem stale and tame now. Would he pay a little more attention to Alice, try to brighten up her lonesome hours? And maybe it would be a charitable act to go upstairs now and then and read to old man Deeley, who seemed not so well of late. Then there was his work —always his work. He ought to write more. He had sold that sonnet to the *Independent,* despite Mrs. Deeley's comments. The irony of placing it with a religious paper when he had written it on a Sabbath day! She would never see the humor of that; and so he would never tell her.

"You must write to me once in a while. But I'll be gone only two weeks. The way I talk you'd think I was going for two years."

"It'll seem like that to me," John said; and, because some feeling beyond friendship was coming to his heart, he did not consider his remark obvious. It was the old, old phrase, said from the beginning of time, that would continue to be said until the world had worn away.

"Why do you take your vacation in June, Mary?" he asked, after a brief silence. "I should think it would be so much better to go away later. The summer will seem so long when you get back."

"Oh, I have to go now. I'm the newest stenographer in our department, and so I was first on the vacation schedule. I was lucky to get any time off at all this year—we're awfully busy, you know. And then, my mother's not very well, so it's better for me to go now."

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"What's Quincy like?"

"Oh, like every other Middle West town. They remind me of a big dish of waffles all made from the same waffle-iron." She leaned back on the railing, and smiled as she looked down the street. Others had come out after the evening meal and were placing sofa-cushions on the steps of their houses. A few of the young men in the various boarding-houses had their straw hats on, and were openly using toothpicks as they stood wondering whether they would stay with the women folk or take a stroll. The first hot weather had come, and the evening was breathless, with no breeze at all. The sun was setting, a huge ball of fire, like a definite announcement that the following day would be hotter yet.

Back of them, in the parlor, they could hear the swish of Mrs. Graham's fan, as she sat in her white waist near the window and rocked incessantly. Miss Taylor had been languidly playing on the piano which was always out of tune, and they were relieved when she suddenly stopped.

Mr. Hall stepped through the doorway. Until now, Mary and John had been alone, and were grateful for an interval apart from the rest, though aware that their seclusion could not last. Mr. Hall had on an alpaca coat, and a white lawn tie with vague pink stripes. His trousers were very tight. He had a palm-leaf fan in one hand, and was dragging a chair after him.

"Hot enough for you?" was his greeting. "But I don't think it's so much the heat as the humidity in the air, do you?"

John thought he couldn't stand him tonight. Mr. Hall plumped himself down on the little stone platform, pulled up his trousers with difficulty, exposing white socks. His low tan shoes were brand new, and had not yet been polished. Enormous bows adorned them. He

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had crossed his legs, and now brought forth a handkerchief, said "Whew!" and immediately began to tuck it into his collar. After all, the steps were as much his as theirs. Then he fanned himself rapidly, and said, "No church for *me* this evening, thank you!" and added that when it got hot in Brooklyn, it certainly got hot. No mistake about that, he told them; and he'd be glad when *his* vacation came. He'd go to Long Branch, where he could get some sea bathing and just lie in the sand all day long. Or maybe he'd go to the woods and let a *long branch* droop over him as he lay on the grass. And then came his inevitable "Ha! ha!" and John knew that it would be impossible to stand him another minute.

"Miss Gwynne and I are going for a little walk," he said; and she, glad too to be released from an evening of Mr. Hall's puns, got up at once. Hatless, they started for the corner drugstore, just as the Eckols joined the second-floor back, with cushions which they had appropriated from the parlor.

"Terrible, isn't he?" John was saying, when they got safely out of distance. "Glad you're going home, Mary?"

"Oh, in a way. And yet I'll miss all this. You know how it is. The minute you're away from a place you want to be back in it again. Funny things, we mortals, aren't we? What are you writing now?"

"Oh, let's don't talk of me tonight. This is *your* evening. I wish I could take you to Coney Island, or Manhattan Beach. Is it too late to start?"

"Yes, I think it is, for I'm taking an early train in the morning, and I want to get plenty of sleep. We'll go when I come back."

"Mary, do you like me just a little?" he finally asked. They had walked by the soda-fountain, because it looked so crowded through the window.

"You know I do. I've told you so a dozen times,

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John. But—I like you more as a friend than—" She couldn't finish; it would have been unmaidenly to get out the word that struggled at her lips.

"But I've come to care for you a lot," John replied. They were under the Elevated, and a train rushed above them when he was in the middle of the sentence. There was always a Mr. Hall or an elevated train in his life. He wished they were walking in some shadowy lane in Stockton, or up that mountain road he had loved as a boy. He would show her the old stone house, standing there always with its dreams and peace.

"See what happens in my absence," Mary said, when the train had gone by. "You'll meet lots of girls you'll like better than me."

He looked at her. Her light hair was lifted from her white forehead because she ran to the pavement to avoid a wheelman who scooted suddenly around the corner. He just missed hitting John, but he never turned, and was off down the street in a jiffy. They smiled at their escape.

"But I won't." John was serious again in an instant. "You know that. You understand me."

"But you'll go awfully far; and I'm a little nobody. Something tells me you're going to do big things. I'm forever telling you that. You've got it in you."

"I'll do better, if I have you." He hadn't known how much he cared until this very moment. Had anyone told him, a half-hour ago, that he would be saying these things to her, just beyond Fulton street, he would never have believed it. Was it because he was going to lose her for a time that he had made the discovery that he loved her? Was it the real thing—this emotion he felt now? Never had he been sentimental over a girl to the point of telling her how much he cared for her. Was he making a mistake now? What was this strange quickening of his heart? If this was love—well, who could tell? He felt

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certain, though, that he was following the right path. How proud he would be of Mary!

"Have me?" she repeated. "You don't mean that—you want to marry me!" She stood stockstill in the middle of the sidewalk, and gazed into his face. "Why, John, you and I could never marry on what you earn. We're poor, both of us. It would be a terrible mistake. But oh, boy, I do thank you for asking me, and wanting me!"

"Mary!" He couldn't get out another word. A trolley banged behind them, and another train shot over them in the air. People were passing, and an open carriage lurched by, with two old ladies in it. But the lovers saw nothing, heard nothing, save the faces of each other and the beating of their hearts.

How strange that Romance walked even here!

"Let's turn back," Mary finally said. "You must not forget to write to me." She added this when they slowly reached the stoop. Mr. Hall and the Eckols had gone; and he saw her in through the outer door that was always left open. They touched hands in the darkness; but she would not let him kiss her.

"You'll give me a little hope, Mary?" he begged.

She looked behind her, to make sure no one was in the hall. The parlor windows were open, and the lace curtains rustled out to the sill; but they could both see that no one was sitting there now.

"Let's think it over—a year from now, if we feel this way, let's meet, on this very stoop, and . . . "

"Oh, Mary, that will be marvelous! We'll feel the same—I'll feel the same, anyhow. And how I'll work this coming year, to make enough to get you out of this—across the River!"

"Let's have it all as a dream to keep," she said, softly. "I do love you, John. But we must wait."

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"I'll wait forever—as long as you wish, Mary." His arm was around her now. There was no one to notice them, no one to guess how, through some miracle, love had come and stood beside two young people on that plain Brooklyn stoop that night.

" 'To thine own self be true,' " she whispered. "Oh, John, I am so happy—and so very, very tired. I want to get plenty of sleep tonight."

"Sweet dreams," he said, and followed her into the dim hall. It was then that she let him touch her lips with his for the first time. In that wild moment he felt that he could conquer not only this world, but all the stars in their courses; and heaven came down and touched him. He felt suddenly that he had loved her before, in some long-gone existence, and strangely some lines of Rossetti's began to sing in his brain,

"I have been here before,
But when, or how, I cannot tell."

When he went back to the Deeleys', he never felt so lonely—far lonelier than on that rainy Sunday morning when he had arrived in New York. For then there had been no one in his life.

Everything was changed for him now. He loved for the first time. How wonderful the world was on that quiet, breathless night!

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CHAPTER VI

I

ALL day Monday he was miserable. He couldn't get away from the office to see her off, for he had a hundred things to do, and Caleb Buncey always expected him on the dot. He had a way of coming, apparently casually, into his little office just on the stroke of nine, looking around, and glancing at the clock when the young editor arrived, maybe a few moments late. He would pretend that he had something to talk over with him, and would cough a little, putting one hand to his mouth, holding some papers in the other. Already he had seen to it that the stenographers were given plenty to do—copying, if nothing else. The office must hum, promptly at eight-thirty. The clerks must be bending over their desks, the bookkeepers deep in their great stiff ledgers. Buncey made his headquarters in the cashier's cage, which had been purposely placed in the centre of the room; and from this vantage point, as from a cave, he could watch every employee. His vigilant eye never failed to discover a laggard. He was one of those creatures who are cruelly unkind and harsh to those under them, and suave and cringing to those above them. He really feared Mrs. Morgan, and had learned to scrape in her presence. At first he tried to dominate John; but when he saw that the proprietess deferred to him and treated him as an intellectual equal, he took the cue. Of course it was obvious

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to him from the beginning that John Darrow was a gentleman, and of a grade distinctly above him; and Buncey, after he had read a few of his editorials and verses, recognized the artist in the boy, and envied him his talent, with that curiously pathetic envy which the mere man of business has of any creative person.

The jangle of the telephone and a rush of callers could not rid John of the sense of Mary's departure. He caught himself thinking of her all during a busy morning; and while a sad little poetess from the South read him aloud —he couldn't stop her—a dirge of her dead lover, every stanza ending with the refrain, "Mah love lies buried in the dust," he counted the designs on her plaid bodice, even the pearl buttons adorning it, and then wondered if Mary had caught the train and got the book he had sent her by special messenger. Through eighteen tearful stanzas the poetess reiterated that her love lay buried in the dust; and he was sure of it when, finally, her voice broke off and he looked at her tragic old face. How terrible life was to some people! He thought of his own happiness—indeed, it was with him always, now—and he pitied his poor little poetess. It was callers like her who ate up his day and sometimes broke his heart; for he had to tell them, tactfully, that the *Banner* was oversupplied with poetry or fiction—anything to get rid of them.

When he got home that evening, Nick was waiting on the stoop.

"You haven't forgotten our date, have you?" was his first question. He was quick to see that John looked careworn and tired. It had been a hot, smothering afternoon, and he guessed that the William Street office was not the coolest place in the city.

"Oh, no!" John said, wiping his forehead. As a matter of fact, he had—completely; but he couldn't tell Nick that.

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"We'll go around and get them at a quarter before eight," the other announced. "Be ready at half-past seven, won't you? They live in Nostrand Avenue. We don't want to keep 'em waiting." He was all excitement at the prospect of an evening with the Miller girls—any girls. This was going to be a regular thing—John and the sisters and himself. Great fun! Too bad they hadn't done it before. Well, the summer had only begun.

II

Kate and Pearl Miller didn't look like sisters—didn't look as if they were related at all. The former was dark, with eyes like fire. She was twenty years old, but looked a bit more than that, because her figure was rapidly rounding out. Her face was full, too, and her white teeth added to her opulent beauty—she was really a stunning girl, and knew it. Pearl was exquisitely moulded, also, but she was a decided blonde, and her hair, though abundant, was straight as corn silk, and her blue eyes hadn't the lustre of her sister's. She was just a year younger than Kate; but she might have passed for seventeen, for she was much smaller than most girls of her age, and her face, thought pretty, was as vacuous as a doll's, and she had a way of looking up at a man which gave the impression of childish innocence. And she *was* innocent. Indeed, she had a certain religiosity that almost filled her life. Both girls sang in the choir at the church which they attended, and though their voices were not wonderful, they had learned to read music readily; and the gospel hymns and anthems were not difficult for them. Pearl practised assiduously, and never missed a rehearsal—she went at anything which interested her with zest and enthusiasm. It was Kate who dilly-dallied, and had to

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be constantly urged to be at the church on those evenings when the choirmaster coached them all.

John rather liked Pearl. And he thought she took a fancy to him, on that first evening. Kate had eyes for no one but Nick, and they met as old friends. They would speak of previous trips to the Island, with Pearl and the Dorsey boy—whoever he was; and they had little jokes that no one else understood. It was as uninteresting to hear them as to read a fraternity paper of some college one has not attended.

"We'll go down to Coney; but we might stop at that Bensonhurst beach on the way," Nick suggested. "Or how would it do to go just to Ulmer Park tonight?"

John had never been there, and he always liked the thought of visiting some place unknown to him.

"That suits me," he said. "How about you, Miss Miller?" turning to Pearl, who was standing nearest to him on the steps of their apartment house. The janitor was bringing the girls' wheels up from the basement. Windows all around were opened, and people were leaning from them, their arms resting on cushions, fixed there for the whole warm evening. Some boys were playing ball in the middle of the street, dodging cyclists and trolley cars expertly as they played. The Miller sisters always looked well in their simple wheeling suits, and many a neighbor turned to look at them when they came out.

"Oh, cut out that 'Miss' business," Nick laughed, putting his arm on John's shoulder affectionately. "It's Kate and Pearl from now on. His name's John, girls!" he cried.

The sisters snickered. They liked Nick's easy ways. He always dispensed with preliminaries and formalities, and they had never failed to have a good time with him.

"Just as you say," John agreed. And he smiled too.

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"I'm for anywhere you want to go—Pearl, and Kate." He got the names out with ease.

"I'd like Ulmer," Kate said. "I haven't been there this year, and they say it's grand."

The wheels were at the curb now, and some of the boys of the neighborhood gathered around to see them start off. The mother of the girls nodded from the third-floor window. Nick and John had not gone up to the apartment, but had waited in the vestibule while the former whistled up through a tube that they were downstairs. Kate and Pearl waved back to their stout parent —a good-looking woman of about fifty, with a genial face.

"Don't stay out too late," she called; but they were off down the street and did not hear her.

Of course they paired off as Nick desired: he with Kate, and John with Pearl; and though they clung together more or less until they reached the outskirts of the city, there was always a tacit agreement that this was the way in which they should ride. The conversation was desultory for awhile, as it usually is when young people meet for the first time, and they stopped once to refresh themselves with drinks. There were little tables in the German-American pavilion where they paused; and though the girls insisted upon sarsparilla, and John took lemonade, Nick ordered a seidel of beer.

"Don't drink that nasty stuff," Pearl said to him. "It'll only heat your blood."

"Oh, it's cool going down," the gay Nick answered, patting his stomach; and when he had had one, he wanted another. He crossed his legs, brought out some cigars, and laughed at the others for their "sissy" libations. It was a waste of money to pay for those things; but Pearl was equally certain that it wasn't a sign of masculinity to swig down two huge Wurtzburger's. Kate remained

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silent through the good-natured discussion. It seemed a matter of indifference to her what Nick drank. She looked at his rumpled hair, and once ran her fingers through a rebellious lock. It was plain to anyone that she was more than fond of him. She couldn't seem to keep her eyes off his handsome face, and he wore that air of a man who revels in his success with a girl in the presence of a fellow who has hitherto never really seen him in the company of women.

"Keep the child quiet," he turned to John to say, motioning with his cigar to Pearl. "Haven't you any influence with her?"

"Oh, I can say what I please," Pearl pursued. "I don't see that Kate has much influence over *you.*"

"And why *should* I have?" her sister inquired. "What he does is his own business. If Nick likes beer, why shouldn't he drink it?" Her voice was low, but firm, and John felt the slight anger beneath the words.

"Exactly!" Nick was delighted to have his actions approved by his side-partner. "And just because you're so nosy, miss, maybe I'll order another seidel!" Which he promptly did.

Pearl said nothing; and out of the corner of his eye Nick glanced at John, to see how he was taking things. The latter felt it far wiser to say nothing. He didn't happen to like the taste of beer, and he didn't know that Nick cared for it so much. They had never even discussed booze. The subject had seldom come up; but now, as he looked closely at his face in the light of a hideous welzbach burner that was behind the table, he thought he saw, for the first time, certain little lines of dissipation around Nick's eyes and mouth. Yet perhaps this was only his imagination.

It was too bad that on this, their first evening out together, there should be a rift in the lute. The sisters

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were so utterly different that he had had hopes of an entertaining time. He had not counted on any antagonism between them; yet he knew very well how relatives were apt to get on each other's nerves sometimes. He could see that Pearl was an out-and-out conservative, and Kate a girl of bohemian tendencies. Her languid eyes looked out upon the world as if to say, "Oh, what does anything matter?" Her mouth was cynical for one so young, and gave her the appearance of a mature Spanish beauty. He wondered if she was the best influence for a fellow like Nick. He would much rather have seen him take up with Pearl. Not that he had any desire to talk with Kate—in the back of his mind was the thought, constantly, of Mary, and if the others had been able to read his brain they would not have been flattered. Half the time he forgot them entirely.

A dull silence followed the slight altercation, and Nick, rather sluggish now after three big seidels, wanted to finish his long cigar. The beer had affected him exactly as Pearl said it would—made him hotter than ever; and beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead. Kate saw them, and wiped them away with her handkerchief. Pearl showed her disgust when her sister openly performed this act. She was doubly humiliated when she saw a couple at a neighboring table lean over and discuss Kate's attentions. She hoped that they thought Nick and her sister were married.

"Let's get along," she said at length. "I want some air."

"Oh, wait a minute," Nick expostulated. "Can't you let a fellow finish his smoke?" He was leaning very far back in his chair now, his feet on the rung of John's. Kate was bending forward, her elbows on the table, looking steadily into Nick's flushed face.

John thought it better to remain neutral, and now, in

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the pause which followed, and seeing that Pearl was really determined to get up and go soon, he tried to make peace by suggesting that it would be just as well to take things easy. There was no hurry, after all.

Then, to his relief, he heard Nick saying, "Oh, well, we might as well start—if the baby wants us to."

This made Pearl angry. She bit her lip, flushed, and was about to retort, when she evidently thought better of it. She got up, while Nick was busy paying the check, and went out to the edge of the pavilion and watched the long line of wheels sprinkle themselves like grains of silver powder on the darkness. John got up too, and followed her to the railing.

"Pretty, isn't it—Pearl?" he said.

"Yes," the girl answered. "But I do wish Nick wouldn't drink. He gets so disgusting."

"He hasn't had much, and I'll see to it that he doesn't take anything more, if it really worries you. We won't stop anywhere else until we get to the Park. How far is it?"

"Only about a twenty minutes' run," she told him. "Hush! here they come."

They all got their wheels in sober silence, and Nick and Kate led the way again.

It was not long before the lights of Ulmer Park beckoned them—a pitifully small imitation of the vast Coney. It reminded John of some poor relation who has tried to dress up in the made-over gown of a rich aunt, and then adorned herself with paste jewels. But the barkers cried just as assiduously, and the crowd was dense and enthusiastic. The same magnetic currents seemed to go through the place, and everybody's face was jubilant. Boys hugged their girls, and the dance floor was soon filled whenever the band started up.

"Not mad at me now, are you, Pearl?" Nick said,

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"Not mad at me now,

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Ten, fifteen minutes must have passed, and their conversation had become desultory and flat. He had asked them about Brooklyn. They had been born there, and had always lived around Nostrand Avenue. It was about time their horizon was broadening. They felt the urge to get away; but they saw no prospect of a change of scene. It was monotonous, living as they did; but their mother was good to them, and they both had jobs in offices, one as a clerk, the other as a stenographer. Their father was long since dead, and John gathered that it was their contribution to the home purse which kept things going. They didn't complain; and they got a fee from the church—oh, no, it wasn't a volunteer choir. A rich congregation could well afford to pay something for its music.

Nick came toward them. There was a different look in his eyes.

"Hello!" he said; and sat down, putting one arm about Kate.

"Don't do that," Pearl commanded, seeing at once the condition he was in.

"Let him alone!" Kate said. "If you don't stop trying to run things, Nick and I'll leave you." She spoke sharply.

John knew that if he broke in now, his interference would prove fatal. It was the better part of wisdom to keep still. But he searched Nick's face, and was determined that he should not get away again.

"Mama wouldn't like this, and you know it," Pearl continued, unmoved by her sister's threat. "Maybe I'll be the one to go—with John."

"Go, then!" Kate flamed back, thoroughly angry now. "Nick's all right. I can take care of him."

John knew he could no longer remain neutral. "We'll not go," he said very calmly His voice was low. They all saw that he meant what he said. There could be no

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trifling with a boy like this. Pearl hung on his words as one drowning might cling to a life-preserver. She knew she had a strong ally now, and she was not afraid.

"Who says you won't go?" Nick got out; and his tongue was thick. He scowled at his friend.

"*I* say so," John stated again, very quietly.

"Then—we'll all go!" Nick announced, and grinned foolishly, as though he had solved a great difficulty, and was completely happy in the solution. There was no doubt as to his having had too much to drink.

"I do think it would be better if we got out into the air," John half whispered to Pearl.

"Oh, I don't need the air," Nick, who was quick to overhear him, said petulantly. "But we'll go, jus' th' same." He grabbed his cap from under the chair where he had placed it, and was the first to get to his feet.

They filed out, and another party of four immediately made a move to occupy their table.

"We're goin' down to the beach at Bens'nhurs'," Nick said. "Come on an' get th' wheels, Jackie." He laughed at the diminutive, which he had never before used.

"How many drinks have you had, Nick?" John said, putting his arm on the other's shoulder. "You shouldn't have done this. It's not fair to the girls." They had walked a little ahead.

"Only one—Jackie."

"More than that, I'm afraid. Suppose we go right back home?"

"Well, two, mebbe! . . . No, we'll stay right down here. Want to see the ocean waves." He smiled that foolish smile again; and John saw in him a totally different person. They had started out to have a good time; the evening was ending, so soon, in disaster. And John might have worked at home, or written that long letter to Mary which had been on his mind all day. What a

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waste of time all this was. He hated himself for not being able to cope with a situation so distasteful to him.

The girls were close behind them, and they all got on their bicycles and moved slowly toward the bathing-beach at Bensonhurst. It was a very short run. They put their wheels on the grass above the sand. Some people were in the pavilion that crowned the row of bathhouses; so Nick suggested that they all lie in the sand and watch the yachts lurching at anchor on the bay. Far off they could see the jewels of Coney Island, twinkling like so many stars, and John was glad they had not gone there tonight—they would have been that much farther from home. A band was playing down the shore, and the waves came up at their feet in countless battalions. It was very peaceful here, with only the lighted sky above them, and distant voices, and the rocking boats, and the endless song of the water. Would the calm of it straighten Nick up? That was the hope in each heart; but just as they thought he was all right once more, he boomed out something foolish. He was prone on his back, his hands under his head, one leg crossed over the other. "Pretty good ol' sky!" he was murmuring. "Like it, Kate? I put it there for you." And he turned and grinned at her.

The moon came up suddenly, and sent a lane of light across the water. Pearl and John saw it first, and cried out. He thought of that first night when he had seen the ocean, and the powdered stars, and this old miracle of the moon; and he was glad for a moment that he was by the water again. He could never grow used to this spreading glory, mountain-bred as he had been. Something clutched at his heart, and he forgot everything save Mary's absence.

"Hell of a moon!" Nick said, lifting his head a little,

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at Kate's suggestion, to see the wonder coming toward them like some monstrous lantern.

It brought John back with a thud. Nick saw him turn away from him.

"If you don' like what I say, s'pose Kate an' I wander down a ways on the beach," he said. He got up quickly, and grabbed Kate by the arm. "Come on," he commanded.

She followed him. He scarcely bothered to help her to her feet.

The others sat motionless, looking out on the enchanted bay. They were dimly conscious that Kate and Nick moved down the sand toward Bath Beach. Well, they could go. It was better to enjoy the night in silence, without Nick's silly interruptions.

Pearl felt the spell of it all. She sat hunched over, and had taken off her hat. Her knees she clutched in the circle of her arms, and her chin rested on them. John said:

"Do you like it here?"

"It's fine," she whispered back, without moving her body. "Looks like the calcium in a theatre, don't it?"

He smiled at the city simile. "It's a little better than that," he answered. "Art can imitate Nature; but I don't think much of that theory of Wilde's about Nature imitating Art."

He was really talking to Mary. She would have understood, but this girl only looked out blankly at the great yellow moon, and said, "Maybe you're right."

Then they sat in perfect stillness, and everything around them seemed to be lost, or merge itself in that matchless beauty.

They must have dreamed for a half hour or more, when they heard a faint cry—a woman's cry—far down the shore.

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"What's that?" said Pearl, leaping to her feet. John got up in alarm.

There was no one in sight now. Behind them the people in the pavilion over the bathhouses sat in mute unconcern. They had not heard the voice.

"Where did they go?" John asked. Something told him that it was Kate who had called out. Pearl was sure of it. She began to run in the direction of Bath Beach, but her feet caught in the damp sand, and her progress was slow. The moon was now a radiant searchlight—strange that he, too, should think of it as that, when he had just smiled tolerantly at Pearl for her simile; and glad he was that it guided them as it did. A hundred yards or so away, they distinctly saw two figures struggling in the sand, up against a wall that separated the beach from the park.

"Stop it!" a feminine voice was saying. "Stop it, Nick! I won't have you kiss me that way!"

Pearl stood still in dismay. John plunged ahead. He reached the wrestling forms, and looked down at them. He was never so angry in his life.

"Stop this!" he called out. His command brought the man to his senses. He turned about, looked up at the intruder, and faced the moonlight. It was a face completely changed. Kate got to her feet as best she could. Her black hair fell in a riot over her face. Her eyes blazed.

"Pearl!" she cried, seeing her sister. Entreaty was in her tone. But Pearl said not a word.

John took Nick by the shoulder. "Get up!" he shouted, and wondered why his voice did not shake. "You're a fine specimen of a man."

The other obeyed, sluggishly. He was relieved that it was only his friend, not an officer. He seemed sober now.

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"What are you butting in for?" he inquired.

"You're a damn fool," John replied.

"Ha!" Nick let out, tossing back his mop of disordered hair, and then stooping to pick up his cap. "'Damn!' he says—our Sunday school boy!—our jingle writer! Who would have thought he had it in him? Say, you're improving, Jackie!"

The irony in his voice infuriated John Darrow. He thought he was going to knock him down. His fists clenched. His heart beat fast. What was the power that saved him from the almost inevitable action? He never could tell. Was this the boy he had liked so well during these past few months? Suddenly he saw him as a monster, a brute.

Then he was conscious of Kate moving toward her sister, who still stood rigid in the moonlight, like a figure of brass, her corn-silk hair illuminated by that celestial calcium. Then he knew that Pearl's arms reached out, and the sisters were linked in a terrible embrace. There was a sob from each of them, nothing more.

"Put on your cap and come with us," John heard himself ordering.

"Say, you can't talk to me like that!" Nick cried.

"Keep still," was all John replied. "You'd better do exactly as I say."

"Didn't know you could be so rough!" Nick laughed. "If you're looking for trouble, maybe we'd better have it out right here."

"Nick, don't be a complete fool. You've done enough for one night. Now be decent and come on with the rest of us. This is a shame, an outrage, but I'm going to get you home. You're drunk—that's all. You'll be sorry for all this tomorrow." He was calmer now. He was glad that he had not lost his self-control.

"Since when are you my guide?" Nick wanted to know,

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coming toward him. "You can mind your own business, John Darrow. I'm able to take care of myself. And I'm not drunk!" he ended in a shout. "What do *you* know about a drunken man, when all you drink is—lemonade?" He uttered the last word with contempt, and his lip curled.

John grabbed him by the arm. "Don't say that!" he said, between clenched teeth. "You'll be sorry if you do." There was no mistaking his tone. In a flash Nick understood that here was a youth not to be tampered with. He completely changed his manner.

"Oh, very well; anything for peace," he said; and then he brushed the sand from his knickerbockers and stockings, put on his cap and looked at the girls. "Coming?" he asked.

"Oh, Nick!" Kate got out.

"Don't 'Oh, Nick' me!" her escort said. "You're just a little simpleton, Kate. That's all I have to say. A lot of trouble about nothing but a little kiss. It's the last time I'll come out with you."

He turned toward the spot where they had left their wheels. Everyone had forgotten them in the excitement.

"Don't say that—Nick," the girl pleaded. "You know I like you, Nick—when you've not been drinking."

He was sullen now. He liked the way she came back, like a dog, for his favor. It was a triumph over John Darrow. He hoped the other saw how much Kate cared for him.

Pearl said nothing. Her arm was still around her sister's waist, as they tried, in the sand, to walk with dignity. But it was grotesque, this marching back toward the pavilion. What a pity it was that the bright moon, which a few moments before they had loved, was here now to pour its relentless light upon them, hiding nothing, and making them all rather ridiculous!

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III

They left the girls at their house on Nostrand Avenue. It was about half-past eleven when they got there. Some boys were still playing in the street, and a few heads still leaned from windows. The ride home had not been over-pleasant. Nick was sullen; but he was the type who could not nurse a grudge very long. The effects of the whiskey he had drunk had completely worn off, and he knew perfectly well that he had been in the wrong. But this knowledge did not tend to make him any happier. He was not of a sufficiently big nature to acknowledge a fault. He felt humiliated that he had been the cause of a scene. He was resentful, too, as one so often is, of an opponent's superior behavior through a trying ordeal. John had acted as anyone in similar circumstances should have done; and Kate had been exactly right. It was only himself who had proved a fool. Knowing this, he was certain that he would have to offer apologies to both of them, and he did not relish the thought. But his affection for John was really deep. As for Kate, she exerted a power over him that he could not withstand; and if he lost Pearl's respect he was aware that she might be able to separate him from her sister. A word dropped here and there would finally build up a wall of prejudice. Therefore Pearl, too, must be appeased. There was a lot for him to do; but he *had* been a rotter. He had spoiled a good evening for everyone.

He kept at Kate's side all the way in, but he said little. Maybe she would take his silence for remorse; and in a sense she would be right. He despised himself. He wished she would say something. He had been cruel to her, and he couldn't blame her if she refused to "make up" with him. Oh, what a confounded mess he was!

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"Nick!" He heard her voice after a mile or two in the darkness.

"Yes, Kate," he answered. He was glad she had spoken.

"You didn't mean what you said, did you?" Her wheel veered toward his, and her lamp cut a diagonal line across the road.

"No, Kate. You know I didn't. I'm—sorry." There! he had got it out, though it almost killed him to say it. He hoped she would not demand any further apology. It was about all he could manage.

"I knew you would be. Let's forget it."

He was jubilant again. Weren't girls easy, after all? But still he had Pearl and John to deal with. They might not be so simple. Wouldn't it be better to say nothing the rest of the way in, and let things take care of themselves? He was lucky in getting out of scrapes. He had never failed yet. But he did wish that John and Pearl wouldn't loiter so far behind. Were they discussing the events of the evening, conniving against him? If he slowed down it would be a sign of weakness. But anyhow he had Kate back.

They rode on again, their tires crunching on the earth. When they came to the Park he hoped that, through the wider roadway, the others would catch up with them. Perhaps they would if he and Kate slowed down. He looked back. No; John and Pearl were very far away, and evidently had no intention of putting on any speed.

He was glad when they got to Nostrand Avenue. Yet he dreaded the short ride from there to his house, with John alone. Damn it! what a complete fool he had been, to run the risk of breaking off a friendship with a fellow so likeable as John Darrow.

Pearl was decent to him when they separated. "See

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you soon," Nick said, casually enough. Kate gripped his hand; and then he and John took the girls' wheels down into the basement for them. There were no further farewells in the vestibule.

Alone with John, he wondered what would be said.

"Want a soda?"

"Wouldn't mind. But maybe a bromo-seltzer would be better for me," Nick tried to laugh.

The ice was broken. John, of course, felt a vicarious shame. He tried to put himself in Nick's place; and he knew how utterly crushed he would have felt had the circumstances been reversed. He told himself that he would not be hard on the boy, but all the way in he had made a firm resolve. He wasn't going to stay much longer in South Portland Avenue. What was the use? The old hankering to get to New York came over him ten times stronger now. He could afford to be generous with Nick, since so soon he would make the change.

In the trying light of the corner drugstore he was aware of the other's pallor and crestfallen air. He felt genuinely sorry for him now. They said little to each other—there was so little to say.

"Did you like Pearl?"

"Yes. Nice girl. I'll have a lemon phosphate," to the clerk.

"So will I," Nick followed suit.

They drank in silence. They were in the store scarcely five minutes. When they got out into the street again, Nick brought himself to say, since it was darker there, "You must think me a jackass, John. I'm terribly sorry for what happened tonight."

John was hoping that he would not say it. It weakened his own resolve.

"You *were* sort of rotten, Nick. There's no mistake about that." He mustn't let him off too easily.

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"You're right."

They were on their bicycles again, and home in a jiffy.

There was a light burning in the lower hall—a most unusual thing at this late hour. As Nick opened the door under the steps, he heard someone in the kitchen. They were putting their wheels away for the night.

His mother called out.

"Oh, is that you Nick? I'm so glad you're home." She came out, and her face looked pale and worn in the gaslight. She had a big spoon in one hand. Alice came running down the steps. Both boys knew that something was the matter.

"What is it?" they asked at once.

"Your father's pretty sick—had a spell, or something. The doctor's just gone." Mrs. Deeley addressed herself to her son, and John felt strangely helpless, curiously remote from them in their family trouble.

"When did it happen?" Nick wanted to know.

"Soon after you'd gone," his sister told him. She was at his side now, and she too was very pale.

"You'd better run back and stay with him," Mrs. Deeley said to the girl. "The doctor told me just what to do—I'm getting another poultice ready," she explained.

"Is it serious?" Nick asked.

"We don't know—yet."

Alice went back upstairs.

"Is there anything I can do?" John inquired. He felt utterly alone standing there.

"Yes—if you'd run over to the drugstore and ask if that prescription's ready yet, I'd be so thankful. They're so slow sending it over."

He grabbed his wheel again and was off before Mrs. Deeley could say another word. He was grateful for the errand. To be of any service made him feel one of them again.

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IV

Old Tom Deeley did not die. He merely lingered on, an authentic invalid at last; and John, when he saw his pitiful face the next day, knew that he could never leave that upper room until he should be taken out of it in a profound sleep. His conscience smote him that once or twice he had doubted the poor fellow's serious illness—an illness which had been leading up to this tragic hour.

"I don't know what we're going to do," Mrs. Deeley said to John, a few days later. "It'll cost so much to give him just creature comforts. But it's lucky we've got such a reliable roomer as you, Mr. Darrow. I guess we'll manage somehow."

He was alone in the dim hall with her. He had just come back from another tired day at the *Banner* office. During the noon hour he had gone uptown and looked at a place in East Twelfth Street—a sunny, quiet spot, that would cost him little more than the South Portland Avenue room. He had almost decided to take it. He could work all the harder, and probably could sell enough poems and editorials to make up the slight difference every month.

Now, his dreams went crashing to the ground. He looked at the weary face of this weary woman, at her knotted hands, her faded hair, her sluggish skin. Alice, in a dowdy house dress, came down from the floor above—she had just been tidying up his room, at this late hour in the day. She had never looked plainer and more tired, more undesirable.

The telephone in the upper hall jangled. She went to it at once.

"No," John heard her saying. There was a pause. "Nice of you, Sam, but I can't go out tonight—not for many nights, I guess . . . Why? Papa's awful sick.

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Got to look after him." She evidently listened to what the other voice said—it must have been brief and to the point, for her next words were, "Well, I can't help it, Sam. Duty first, you know. I'm sorrier than you are, if you only knew. I'd love to go to Hurtig and Seaman's . . . No; good-bye, Sam."

And the receiver clicked up. John knew who Sam was —the postman whose route had been changed—the one Nick had told him about. And something made him believe that he was the kind of fellow who would never take the trouble to ring Alice up again.

As she left the telephone and started down the stairs, Nick's voice was heard breaking into a rollicking song.

"I'm half crazy, just for the love of you!" he was stating with lyric rapture. He was dressing for a "party" of some sort, and John pictured him with his military brushes in his hands, trying to make his recalcitrant hair stay in place. Little did Nick know, or care, about Alice's disappointment. The door of his room was closed; probably he hadn't heard the telephone ring. Much less had he known of the conversation with the postman.

There was a faint call from the third floor. Old Tom Deeley needed something. "Alice! Alice!" John heard him moaning, petulantly. "Come here!"

And it was as if he, too, heard a call, a summons, to a dreary duty. He knew he could not leave these people now.

There seemed to be a chain upon him. Yes, it lengthened now and then, giving him a certain amount of freedom. Then an unseen hand grasped it, and he was conscious that he was a prisoner—always in the clutches of Circumstance. He was still too young to know that all humanity is thus shackled, forever at the mercy of some hidden Destiny.

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CHAPTER VII

I

SHE wrote to him from Quincy. The letter came on Wednesday, at the close of a suffocating afternoon. He had crossed the Bridge, certain that there would be some word from her. It was the only thing that made life worth while now for him—the consciousness of her love.

"Oh, how good it is to be home, John dear," was what he read. "But I know now—I am sure of the one great fact: I love you. I did not know until I came away. I shall but count the days until we meet again. How tired I was! But with my new happiness, and Mother's almost complete recovery—I think my radiant looks must have helped her to get well!—both my body and soul are rested. I did not know that life could be so ineffably beautiful. Even Quincy is glorified now. If we could but be together! . . . I am going to type those new poems you showed me just before I came away—the long one will take a bit of time; but don't be impatient. I know it by heart already, and I want it to look lovely on the printed page. Then you must put the magic of your name at the end, and send it to *The Independent,* who will print it, I know, in that whole column on the very first page, and how proud I'll be of you all over again! Why, even Bliss Carman couldn't write a better poem! It haunts me. I keep saying those lines to myself,

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'How beautifully now the Spring
Goes rushing through the world!'

You must write, write, write! If I had my way, you should never be one hour in an office, but out somewhere on the hills, singing all day long, and at dusk, coming home to me. I know you so well, dear, dear John. But I realize how important it is for you to get on your feet; and how utterly impossible it is to marry until you have found your way. Maybe it is true, as you once said to me, that our fathers and mothers married on nothing; but times were different then. It costs more to live now. But this I do want to say to you: I'm willing to stick it out for a year or so at business, just so that we can be together, as we should be, as I feel God has ordained it to be. Why shouldn't I do my share, as you will do yours? It's all nonsense that women shouldn't work. They're doing it more every day, and I'd be only too proud to be of some little help. And oh, John dear, how I long for our life together! . . . Meanwhile, don't forget—'To thine own self be true.' I love you. There is nothing more that I can say."

II

Looking back afterwards, he wondered how a mortal could be so richly endowed one day, as he was, and so utterly bereft another. She had told him that she loved him; he knew only too well how much he loved her.

That night he scarcely slept. Even South Portland Avenue was glorified for him; and what was the long hot summer to be but one loud song of joy, after Mary returned?

But she never returned. The frightful thing that happened seemed for days like a nightmare; like a sickening jest of that inexorable Fate which hangs above us all.

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He wrote her or extravagantly telegraphed her every day—sometimes three times a day. In one gay letter she called him to account for his wild expenditures—there were no such things as night letters then; and twenty words by telegraph cost, or so it seemed to Mary, a great deal of money.

He had planned to meet her the following week. She would get in at six o'clock—had she taken such a train on purpose, so that his work would not be interfered with? Ah! That would have been just like her!

He went out to luncheon, singing. The narrow streets by the Bridge were like hawthorn lanes to him. The newsboys were dryads, the people were shadows in a dream. His cup of life was full and flowing over; and the years before him were but pigmies in his path whom he would conquer by merely crunching under his feet. And Mary was coming home tonight! What did anything else matter?

One of the dryads hailed him by the World Building, where he had paused to consider where he would take his midday meal.

"Extra! Extra!" he heard the worn-out words, and remembered thinking that to call every edition an "extra" was like putting a special-delivery stamp on every letter, and thereby losing the very sense of importance one wished to attain.

He did not even look down at the boy. Yet the words that were to change the whole course of his life were staring up at him, from that sensational paper, and already hundreds around him were reading what meant nothing to them, but everything to him.

How he finally happened to glance at a bulletin board and the news, he could not recall. But there it was—the line that told him her train had been wrecked, and twenty lost.

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Blindly he pushed his way out of the crowd, and like one insane tore a paper from a newsboy's hand, hurling him a coin, and dizzily swaying into Frankfort street. There the list leaped at him.

Mary—his Mary—was among those who had died instantly in one of the worst wrecks the road had ever known.

Yet his own life must go on. His first thought was that she would wish it so. But could the hideous fact be true—could it be possible that he, John Darrow, was leaning against a wall in a dirty little newspaper-littered street, discovering suddenly that his love, his hopes, his highest dreams were all gone, in one frightful, devastating instant? This had happened to others—such news had come many times to men and women. That it should come to him was incredible.

He reeled, and almost toppled over. For he thought of those words of hers before she went away, "I want to get some sleep."

Oh, she was sleeping now! She would sleep so soundly through the long years to come, and not even his love could awaken her!

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PART II

THE THICK OF THE FIGHT

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CHAPTER I

I

THE long, low room in East Fifteenth street was crowded. Mrs. Stanhurst knew how to fill her place, at least; and if not always with the most important people, sometimes with exceedingly interesting ones. She had a passion for celebrities. Failing them, she would gather around her the cousin or aunt or step-sister of a writer or an artist whose name was on every lip, and seemed to derive a curious pleasure from this vicarious contact. She had just enough money to pay the rent and a few necessary bills, yet there were persistent whispers that sooner or later a rich aunt would die and leave her a goodly sum. She was one of those enviable people who can give a party for almost nothing. There were always a half-dozen young men around her—struggling poets and dabblers in sculpture or something or other, who supplied the beer and whiskey and the fruit for the punch-bowl; and Signa, her shabby Finnish maid, could concoct a salad and sufficient sandwiches at a moment's notice which lasted an evening through. No one knew how she did it. Everyone simply took things for granted in this riotous set, and went on puffing cigarettes and sipping out of tall glasses.

There were many divans about the place, and Japanese lanterns which gave an uncertain light fell here and there from little wall-brackets. Once in a while the candle grease would trickle down some fellow's back, but he

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wouldn't care in the least. Few of them wore evening clothes; and Mortie Langdon, who was always the life of the party, with his screamingly funny imitation of DeWolf Hopper, said that his light tweeds matched the grease perfectly, so what did it matter? "And Elsie Triggert doesn't care, either," he would remark, looking down the room at a battle-scarred little artist who dressed as though she had picked up all the stray doilies before leaving her studio, and plastered them all over herself. It was rumored that once, when she discovered a spot on her gown, she simply pinned a pansy over it and went on to Mrs. Stanhurst's and gave the matter no further thought. She was a living cozy-corner, an animated whatnot. She never missed an evening out, in rain or starlight. Had she been absent from any gathering, it would have seemed like a party without refreshments. She always nestled amid countless sofa-cushions, and smoked her little bobbing head off. A group of young men invariably gathered around her. Though she would never see forty-five again, she had a curious attraction for youth. Perhaps it was that tiny seed of talent in her that kept her forever one of them; for no matter how infinitesimal one's genius may be, something of the ageless gods is in the hearts of those who work in beautiful things. Poor little Elsie Triggert had never been what the world calls a success. Her drawings had grave defects; but she honestly loved her day's work, which led to a night's release in some studio or café, and she had a deep appreciation of the gifts of others, and an eternal sense of the wonder and glamour of life. She eked out a precarious livelihood; but she never worried about the future. Nothing could be worse than the past. Her lover had died when she was in her twenties, and though she had stood up valiantly beneath the blow, there was an ache forever in her heart, and she laughed in self-defense, and perpetually gave the

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impression that she was light and frivolous. She had a horror of being pitied; yet she was quick to pity others when they came to her with their burdens. It was her capacity to understand which attracted both boys and girls, and sometimes her studio way up in One Hundred and Ninth street was a confessional as well as a workroom. Mortie Langdon had found it a refuge on more than one occasion when he had a nervous hang-over and thought that never again could he write a word. Miss Triggert braced him up physically, and then spiritually with some sound words of caution.

On this particular evening, Mrs. Stanhurst seemed a bit nervous. The party was going beautifully. Every one was talking at once; but she kept near the door and every now and then glanced anxiously at the clock. It was a cuckoo clock, and an industrious bird appeared every fifteen minutes and chirped heroically. Was he cheating tonight? He seemed to come out a moment after he had gone in. If John Darrow failed her tonight she would never forgive him. It was no little achievement to have corralled the promising young editor of *The Arcadian,* the fashionable periodical which had been launched only about a year. He had promised faithfully to come. It couldn't be that he was staging an entrance for himself—he wasn't the kind to do that. But one could never tell about these rising poets and editors. New York was ready to spoil them all, John Darrow in particular. He was just twenty-seven now, and, while in no sense handsome, he possessed more than the average mortal's share of charm; and since he had occupied the comfortable chair at *The Arcadian,* he had leaped into prominence, was meeting everybody, was being gushed over and invited everywhere, having a desperate whirl of it, and popular as no young editor had been for a long time in the whirlpool of literary New York. The danger

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was that he would go down in the strong currents. That is what Martin Shaftsbury predicted; and Martin was wise with the wisdom of thirty-six. His little wife, Beulah, used to say that her poet husband was an uncanny reader of character—having little of his own to occupy his time. He would shake his thick blond mane of hair—it grew in a riot and fell down in straight cascades over his forehead, almost concealing, at times, his piercing gray eyes; and his deep voice would rumble out some oracular statement concerning this or that member of their circle. He drank to excess, and there was a legend that about once a year he beat his pretty little wife, who neither denied nor confirmed the rumor. If it was true, she bore no evidences of his cruelty, but looked up at him idolatrously when they were seen dining downstairs at Mouquin's or, when he sold a manuscript, at the Brevoort or the old Café Martin.

Martin Shaftsbury was stouter than a poet should be—despite Browning and Rossetti. Over-indulgence had brought on a surplus of flesh; but he had the constitution of an ox, and it took at least a dozen glasses of whiskey to put him out of business. Sober, he was the most delightful companion imaginable; in his cups he was impossible—vindictive, quarrelsome, turning upon his best friends in a storm of wrath, stubborn and resentful of any criticism, vain and boastful. People avoided him in such moments, as well they might; for his sharp tongue spared no one. All his inhibitions gone through the stimulus of drink, he insulted whom he pleased—and then sent tearful telegrams of apology the next morning—collect.

He had consumed about eight highballs on this particular evening, and was now ready to recite his newest poem—a long dirge on the death of young April. He could read wonderfully. He knew this, and would take

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his poems to editorial offices and insist upon chanting them to the editors. Inevitably, under the spell of the man's forceful personality, hypnotized by his resounding voice, they bought what he offered. Then he would call up Beulah, and command her to lunch with him downtown, and get a little drunk during the rest of the afternoon. He was a picturesque figure along the Avenue, in his greatcoat of daring yellow, to match his hair, his hulking form slowly swaggering down the street. Beulah, when she trotted along at his side, looked like a child, and had to take two steps to his one. She would clutch his hand, and pant a little; but she stuck close to him whenever she could, for she knew his mania for women and drink, and her vigilant eye had kept him from many an escapade and swinging-door. She adored him, and copied all his manuscripts on the typewriter—he wrote such an untidy, gross hand that no one could make head or tail of his poems when they were written on the backs of stray envelopes or on menu-cards in the restaurants he haunted.

Mrs. Stanhurst saw that he wanted to recite. Anxious as she was about the non-appearance of Darrow, she had the wit to see that the others must not be made to suffer because she was nervous. The party must hum along, the punch-bowl be replenished, and even a bottle of whiskey brought out, if necessary. This was always a last resort, however; she could hardly afford whiskey at every one of her parties; but once in awhile a kind-hearted guest brought a couple of quarts with him. It was Mortie who had played the good Samaritan tonight, and with a broad grin he had put out the decanters, just when Mrs. Stanhurst had given up hope concerning Darrow. Her tired face beamed; and the long jade earrings she always wore, dangled with obvious pleasure. She knew that if the men "tanked up" a bit all would be well.

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Shaftsbury leaned forward, his eyes gleaming at the sudden plethora of liquid refreshment, gulped down a huge amount without water, and then looked over at Agnes Stanhurst, as much as to say, "Shall I begin now?" She caught the look, and nodded affirmation. One glance at the door, and she rose, clapped her hands to get the attention of the rest, and announced that the poet would give them all something new, right from the manuscript. The Gedley girls, from Staten Island, nudged each other at this—it was their first appearance at Mrs. Stanhurst's, and they were all excitement. They were still alluded to as "the girls," although they were well along in the thirties, and were eager entertainers themselves. Their turn would undoubtedly come next.

Martin Shaftsbury settled back in his big chair—there was a particular one always reserved for him. Beulah put another drink at his side and huddled near him. Everyone else got comfortable—there must have been twenty or more present—and then the poet's voice boomed out:

"I finished this only today. It's one of my *best* things."

They were used to his saying that. No one minded. His latest poem was always his latest love. He began at once, the sonorous tones ringing down the room, a look of adoration on Beulah's face—heaven only knew how many times she had heard the lines since morning—Elsie Triggert moving back and forth like a thin pendulum in time with the cadences; the Gedley girls enraptured, with hands clasped tightly in their laps, and leaning against each other's shoulders; all the young people fascinated when Shaftsbury came to lines that sang themselves, and equally fascinated by the personality of the reader, swaying, and seemingly oblivious of everyone and everything around him. He tossed his heavy hair from his eyes every

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now and then, and once he reached out for his whiskey, when he came to a passage that gave a glowing picture of the wine of life and the transitoriness of our mortal existence. They smiled at this gesture, so simply made; but they did not smile at Shaftsbury's poetry. He really was an authentic singer, a man of rare gifts; and he lived like a poet, or rather as the world thinks a poet should live. He didn't care if publishers refused his work; it was enough that he had written it. And if Beulah had not insisted that he take his wares to market, it is doubtful if he would ever have budged from their rooms, except to eat and drink in the places he loved.

He reached the end of the poem—a thrilling climax. Beulah, who knew, of course, what was coming, and how it would affect the others, looked up, radiant—as happy as though she herself had done the trick. There was a spontaneous burst of applause, and Shaftsbury was glowing with his triumph—he loved adulation. These moments were the best in life for him.

"Shall I give them another?" he wanted to know. He had taken another drink while the applause was sounding in his happy ears, and was primed for an hour or more of reading. But his hostess did not hear him. Above the clamor, she had heard a creaking on the stairs; and the door, which had been left partly ajar, softly opened, and John Darrow stood on the threshold, looking about him. The gaslight from the hall revealed a tall, slender young man, enveloped in a fur coat, on the shoulders of which some powdered snow had fallen. At his side was a girl of great beauty; and at once half the people in the room knew who she was. They had seen her at the Empire, where she had just made her début in a Pinero play. It was Constance Muir, whom the critics had lauded as a coming actress, a girl of more than brilliant promise. She had swept the city like a breath of that April wind of which

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Shaftsbury had just read so beautifully; and a career in America was before her. Her blue eyes danced, and her mop of soft brown hair was piled on a head that a goddess might have envied. She was undoubtedly English. Her skin had that light beneath it which only an English skin ever reveals—that freshness and glow of health which cannot be duplicated. She had poise and dignity—great gifts in one so young—she was but twenty-three; and in her ermine cloak, beneath which could be seen an evening gown of light blue texture, she was a picture framed by the door—a picture that men and women drank in with equal pleasure and a sense of complete satisfaction. She knew her power, standing there. She had come from one triumph tonight, before the audience uptown, and she enjoyed this second appearance, with all the rich arrogance of youth when it knows it is irresistible.

"Oh, come in!" gasped Agnes. She never knew how she got to her feet. She held out her hands. There was silence in the room behind her.

"I knew you wouldn't mind if I brought Miss Muir," Darrow was saying. "You said I might bring anyone, Agnes. I knew she'd like it here. Everyone does." He was over the threshold now, and was taking off his greatcoat. Agnes Stanhurst, joyful that she had succeeded in getting not only John Darrow but this glorious young creature as well, could scarcely speak. If Miss Muir was having a triumph, so, undoubtedly, was she, and the intoxication of having this addition to her party made her inarticulate.

"Come right into my room," she managed to get out, "and leave your things. Then—I'll—I'll introduce you." Without turning to left or right she led her distinguished guest to the back room, where there was a tall oval mirror, and a pile of coats and hats strewn about, some on the bed, some on the floor and chairs.

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Darrow, meanwhile, had disposed of his hat and coat in the hallway, and was back in the long room, shaking hands with everybody he knew, being presented informally to the others. It was "Hello, Martin and Beulah," and "Well, of all things, Mortie!" and "How are you, Elsie?" and a sort of hail-fellow-well-met slap on the back with the younger men, and much delighted laughter from the girls. The Gedley sisters were thrilled again. So this was the young editor-poet they had heard so much about, and they were actually in the room with him at last! They wondered how he would like their singing and playing—if they could ever do anything now, with Miss Muir in the room!

But Martin Shaftsbury was not pleased at the arrival of these belated guests. He frowned, and Beulah, seeing and understanding, patted him gently on the arm. She didn't say anything—she knew better than that.

"Get me another drink," he ordered his little wife, and did not even hold out his glass. He merely indicated it with a nod of his great head.

"I wish, Martin—you—wouldn't," she protested, not moving, and trying to keep her voice low so that no one would hear her.

"Get me another drink," her husband repeated, not looking at her. Two or three quite near them heard the tone. This had happened before. They were not anxious to see a repetition of previous unpleasant scenes.

For the fraction of a second Beulah hesitated. She looked about her, and there was a pitiful look in her eyes—the look of a woman who has been cowed. John saw the look. His heart went out to her. He was quick to sense what had happened.

"Maybe Martin would like to drink with me," he offered, stepping up to the poet. "I'm as thirsty as the devil."

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"I want to drink alone," Shaftsbury boomed out, in his best reading voice. "You heard me, Beulah. Do as I say."

There was no mistaking his meaning now. He was a little drunk, that was all. His wife knew what he was like in his cups, God knows; but she dared not disobey him.

"There's no more left," Mortie said.

"You lie!" came from Martin. "There were two bottles—I saw them. Don't try to hold out on me. I won't have it." His eyes showed a sinister light.

"But—" John began.

"You keep out of this!" Martin flamed. "You've done enough for one evening. Spoiled my reading—damn you!"

"You don't mean that," John said, coming closer to the hulking form in the big chair.

"I certainly do, you whipper-snapper! What in hell do you amount to, anyhow? A piffling versifier like you breaking in on a man of genius like me!" He put one hand on his chest, and with the other swept the glass on the arm of his chair to the floor. It crashed loudly, and broke into a dozen pieces, just as Mrs. Stanhurst and Miss Muir came back into the room.

A deathly silence followed. Beulah had risen, terrified.

"Why, Martin," she gasped, finally, and there was terror in her face. "John didn't know, when he came in, that you were going to read something more. Don't talk to him that way—please don't, Martin dear!" She put out one hand appealingly. But now her huge husband rose, like some prehistoric animal, all out of drawing, and he seemed to fill the room with his bulk.

"Don't *you* butt in, Beulah! Keep out of this. I'm saying what's true, and John Darrow knows it!"

Silence again. John had never seen Martin quite this

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way, in the year he had known him; but he knew that when he got tipsy there was nothing anyone could do. He was like a lion in a jungle, roaring and swaying. No wonder Beulah feared him! But he didn't mean to let him talk to him like this. Once for all he would have it out with him, despite Mrs. Stanhurst, Miss Muir, and the rest of their friends.

"Look here, Martin, you're mistaken. How could I possibly know that you hadn't finished?" He looked him straight in the eye. He wasn't afraid of him, despite his superior physique. Besides, there would be no fist fight here. It was too ridiculous to think of, even. But he had heard of Martin's pugnacious tendencies, his idiotic desire, when drinking, to quarrel violently—about nothing at all.

"Martin!" It was Agnes Stanhurst who spoke. She was flurried, alarmed, humiliated. That this should happen when she had two such charming guests to add to her little "at home"! How like Martin to spoil everything; to bring the evening to an end in disaster! She hurried to his side. "What does this silly talk mean? Has anyone offended you, you dear, fuzzy lion?" And she stroked his head, and pushed him gently back into his chair. "There! Sit still, and Mortie will bring you something—if there's anything left," she added, catching a look in Mortie's eye.

"Oh, there's plenty left! What were you going to give your new arrivals, coming in to break up everything?" He was like a spoiled child now. He glared around him, and was almost ridiculous. Worse, he knew it—knew at once that he had made a fool of himself. Down in his heart he was a bit jealous of John, whose editorial success had been sensational, and whose poetry was now beginning to appear everywhere. And when he saw him come in with Constance Muir at his side, he was infuriated. "Damned *poseur*!" he had said to him-

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self. "Damned snob!" Moreover, it always hurt his vanity to see anyone else absorb even a part of the attention at one of these gatherings. He looked upon himself as the foremost poet in the whole city—as, in a sense, he was, and as any critic of John's perspicacity would have been the first to acknowledge. He craved the limelight constantly. When it swerved, as it is bound to do from the star, even on the stage, to some minor character, he couldn't tolerate his temporary eclipse. His refuge was invariably another drink—and then, a quarrel. That he might fail to sell his next poem to Darrow never entered his mind—for that he must be given credit. He had insulted several unforgiving autocrats in the magazine world; but he snapped his fingers, literally, in their faces, and marched out of their offices, indignant and proud. They came back to him one at a time, or he noticed that they changed positions, and entered the world of business, while he kept on with his art, lived as he pleased, and continued to place his poetry with one or two periodicals who never failed him in his hour of need. Allowances had to be made for his temperament; and the bigger the man, the bigger his capacity for wiping the records from the slate. Shaftsbury counted upon this quality in those with whom he disagreed; and in the end he was invariably the victor.

Agnes Stanhurst only smiled. "Here, Martin, I want you to meet Miss Muir." The English actress had joined the group around him. "Miss Muir, this is our poet—our greatest poet," she added; and when Martin looked up at that glorious face in front of his chair, from which he did not now deign to rise, he was completely appeased. A lovely woman could always erase the thought of anything unpleasant. Beulah saw his glance. She was thoroughly broken in to Martin's ways. But she knew that she was his final refuge, his indispensable haven at the end of

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any rainbow trail; and now she sat back placidly. But if she caught a look of comprehension in her husband's face, she also was aware of a curious light in the eyes of Constance Muir when she shook hands with Martin. It was not seen by anyone else in the room. But Beulah never forgot it.

II

The Gedley girls had never before seen a man in his cups, except on the Staten Island ferry, now and then, or on the street; and they were so upset by Shaftsbury's behavior that they could scarcely do their little stunt when Agnes urged them to go to the piano. They both wore glasses, and through a sense of maidenly modesty, they never had their neck-bands cut very low. Their teeth were too close together, and Miss Maria, who played, breathed through her mouth. Susan, being a singer, had learned better. Her thin lips were compressed most of the time, and she had an eager, hungry look. Their flat chests and sallow skins, their straight, colorless hair and thick eye-glasses made them anything but physically appealing. Of course they were virgins—"by acclamation," Mortie whispered to Elsie Triggert, after one glance at their pathetic figures when they first entered the room, weary after their trip from Staten Island, yet anxious to make a good impression.

They were fond of songs with a strong sentimental appeal, which told of how God took a bit of the blue of heaven, a bit of the rose's petal, and a pinch of the dawn—and that was *you*. They felt that the climax was well worked up to, the heart interest beautifully sustained; and Miss Susan would give a little gasp on the all-important word at the end, and sit down flushed and feverish.

Agnes Stanhurst had met them only recently, and

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thought they might enjoy an evening with her, and fill in a gap with their music. She knew, of course, that they were only amateurs, and that perhaps a few of the sophisticated crowd would smile when they performed; but they loved parties so, and gushed so over Agnes that she had to ask them in sometime—better have them at her very next reception and get the thing over with. But she did not read them well. They were the kind that clung like leeches, and never again did they have to be formally invited; they simply came. After a while, no one minded in the least. Someone always got sandwiches for them, and paper napkins and ice-water—they never touched alcohol or cigarettes—and they adorned, if one could put it that way, a corner of the room, their music roll a perpetual reminder that they were willing to "help out" at any moment.

Tonight they were more than willing. After Shaftsbury's little scene, Agnes looked around and saw their frightened faces. It was as if she had suddenly seen a port in a storm.

"Oh, Miss Gedley," she cried to Susan, "won't you sing for us now?" And Susan glanced at Maria as much as to say, "I will, dear, if *you* will"—knowing all the time what the reply would be.

There was a moment of light applause as the two virgins wended their way to the instrument at the end of the room.

Maria struck a few heavy chords, by way of trying the piano, rose again and twirled the stool, looked down at the pedals, drew her handkerchief from her pathetically flat bosom and wiped her nervous hands, while Susan selected a ballad she was particularly sure of, and smiled in the candlelight.

The preliminary accompaniment was flowery, requiring deft fingering, and the crossing of the player's hands.

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There was a slight titter from Mortie, fortunately unheard by everyone save Miss Triggert, who was next him, and then Susan's voice rose piercingly high above the chords, and she was telling everyone something about the wide, open spaces where the south wind blew, and a garden in the southland where the bright acacias grew, and wouldn't it be wonderful there to dwell with You. Yes, wouldn't it be wonderful there to dwell with You. (Business of crossing hands.) Oh, love, it would be glorious there to dwell with You. There was another stanza that bore the message of a certain desolate sea, where the stars hung like faint jewels, or dreams of Arcady, and wouldn't it be magical there to float with Thee. Yes, wouldn't it be magical there to float with Thee. (Again the left hand, like a white dove, swept from the bass clef to the other end of the keyboard.) Ah! wouldn't it be magical there to float with Thee!

Everyone thought this was surely the final stanza; but no, the key changed instantly to a minor; and with much passion the singer knew of a distant spot where the poppy languisheth, and hot upon all lovers is the flaming flower's breath, and oh, my dear it whispers of Love, and Peace, and—Death! Ah, me! It whispers constantly of Tears, and Doubt—and Death! (A final chord of great destructive force. A thrilling dramatic pause.) Alas! it whispers evermore of Tears, and Doubt—and Death!

Mortie gave a curious gulping laugh—he had sneaked a drink when Shaftsbury wasn't looking, and could no longer control himself; but Elsie Triggert, who wouldn't have hurt anyone's feelings for the world, put her hand before his mouth, and shoved him back on the couch where they were sitting, and saved the day by calling out, "Poor Mortie's crying!" And the Gedley girls never knew the difference.

"And now we'll hear Mortie!" Agnes cried.

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"Yes! DeWolf Hopper, Mortie! Come on!" several others were quick to demand.

Although he had been doing this uproarious stunt for years, they never tired of it. Mortie, though only half the size of the big blustering comedian, somehow managed to make himself resemble him when he swaggered across the floor, and roared:

"Behold El Capitan!
Notice his misanthropic air,
Notice his penetrating glare!
Come, match him if you can—
He is a champion beyond compare!"

The ringing Sousa song set all their feet to pattering, and when Mortie gave the signal, after one stanza triumphantly alone, they all joined in the second chorus, as eager as he to make the old walls ring. Agnes would sometimes wonder what the tenants below must think; but they never complained. Indeed, they came out into the hall to listen, had Agnes only known it, strangely unlike most New York neighbors.

They wouldn't let Mortie stop. "Again!" they all cried. And he would goodnaturedly repeat the song, and then do a scene from "Panjandrum," until their sides shook, and Mortie would flop on the couch beside Elsie Triggert, too tired to do anything more.

It was long after two o'clock, always, when Agnes' parties broke up.

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CHAPTER II

I

WHEN *The Arcadian* was founded the year before, there were those who said that gruff old Major Moulton was quite out of his head to sink so much in a venture that was foredoomed to failure. But he went doggedly on, as he had a way of doing, believed in only by his young wife who had seen him take chances many times and come out triumphant. The Major was getting along toward seventy, and had made a pile in Wall Street—enough to keep him in luxury for the rest of his days; but like most men who are willing to gamble, he couldn't be content with one fortune. He had to occupy himself with fresh schemes. To sit in a club window did not appeal to him in the least. He would wear his hat in his office, but not in a club window; and he would take a nip from his desk, but not at a table in full view of those who passed on the Avenue. "Damned waste of time, club life," he snorted. "No ladies there. Ugh! I hate old bachelors and men who never know when to go home to their wives!" He always had an eye for a pretty face, and the older he got the younger he wanted everybody to be. His third wife was but thirty-one years old. A kindly heart beat beneath the Major's rough exterior, and he was happy only when he was making others happy. But he had a temper when the need arose—a fiery gleam in the eye, from his old military days—he had fought

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valiantly in the Civil War—but he recovered at once from any display of wrath, and was the first to express contrition for unpleasant words uttered.

His one regret in life was that he had remained childless. He believed firmly in youth, and he loved to give striplings their first chance. It was a sort of vanity with him—an egotistical debauch; and though he sometimes patronized just a little too much, no one minded—least of all those whom he honestly helped. His own swift methods of work were an inspiration to those whom he employed; and he had given many a youngster his happy start along that highroad which leads to fine achievement.

He looked around for an editor when he launched *The Arcadian,* his all-fiction and essay magazine; and John Darrow was his final choice. He had seen his name in various periodicals, and he liked the young blood his verse revealed, the young spirit and buoyancy of it. It was men of this calibre who appealed to him; but of course Darrow would have to prove to the Major that he was willing to drudge a little and keep regular hours. He knew of his career on the *Banner,* of his clever editorials which Mrs. Morgan signed—there are subterranean passages through which all such literary information moves—and he said to himself that if this young man could be so clever a Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde he was undoubtedly just the fellow for *The Arcadian.* John Darrow had come to know everybody, and he would not be too expensive. The Major was cautious before he was philanthropic.

He sent for John, and liked him immediately—though part of his clever game was to pretend that he didn't. He got a history of the boy—he looked upon him as little more than that—and said to himself that anyone who could stand up under the blow of losing a sweetheart in a train accident was made of the right stuff. He was sure

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he would prove steady and strong. He was anxious to know a young man who never winced at such an arrow from the bow of Fate. "I don't know how he stood it," a friend of John's told the Major. "I'd have drunk myself to death from the moment I got the news. But he—he just bore up quietly. I remember he wondered what it all meant, and why it should happen to Mary—and to him. But beyond that he never said much."

Never said much! Humph! Then that was the man for the Major. Showed the right spirit. He hated a chatterbox; he loathed gossip. His business secrets would be kept if he had a man like John at the helm; and of course he would select an equally close-lipped man for office manager, and come in only when he had to, after things got going. A delightful life, this—backing a literary enterprise, watching it grow, holding the reins, signing the checks and experiencing the exhilaration of another success in his dotage. You couldn't stop the Major. If he lived to be a hundred he'd still have charge of something. He and his wife, who had secret literary longings, would look over the manuscripts—the important ones, anyhow; and it would be great fun. "I like to be occupied evenin's," was the way he put it. "Might as well be readin' clever stories as gallivantin' through Europe." Those dropped "g's" were the despair of Mrs. Moulton; but so long as the Major held on to his dollars she didn't complain. She watched any pet enterprise of his like a hawk, and never let him spend a penny too much. They got on beautifully together, traveled when it suited their whim. He had all her youthful enthusiasm—more, some people said.

Naturally, Mrs. Moulton had looked John Darrow over before he was engaged; and she agreed with the Major that he would do nicely. "I got him to tell me lots that he wouldn't tell a mere man," she proudly revealed

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to her husband one day. "I think he's high-minded, but not a prig. Yes, hire him. You won't regret it. But don't give him full authority at once. Nobody should have too much leeway right off. This'll mean that we won't go to Europe as soon as we expected. But it'll be great sport to supervise things here, and if you're satisfied, I am, Major Moulton." She always called him that. It pleased him, and she ran the two words together rapidly, making it sound like one—"Majormoulton."

They certainly did not regret postponing their jaunt to Germany and Italy. For these dissipations at home were as good sport as any journey; and the Major's dinner in his home for the editorial and business staffs which he gathered about him was one long to be remembered. John had suggested that they include a few writers and artists as well, so that everyone could get acquainted from the beginning. So, after the first advance copy of the *Arcadian* was off the press, those in the table of contents sat down to another table, and the magazine was launched with a bang and a wild blowing of trumpets. There were witty speeches—the Major loved nothing better than to toast everybody and lubricate his tongue with champagne and then let it wag as it would. Mrs. Moulton, who had heaps and heaps of reddish hair, and dim freckles and a nose that turned up ever so little, and shrewd, penetrating eyes, knew when to give him the signal to sit down; but often he resented even her interference. He would lose himself in a tangle of similes and flowery metaphors and be utterly unconscious of the smiles of those who listened, open-mouthed, to him. On and on his record would run, and though he began with a definite goal in mind, he would sometimes discover that he was talking eloquently of the Boxer rebellion or the Babylonian captivity when what he had intended to lead up to was a feeling of coöperation among those who worked side by side

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in his office. Never mind; his stories were droll, if not screamingly funny. What matter if he repeated them over and over? The Major was the Major, and he drank like a gentleman, God bless him, and wasn't it splendid that he had a young wife to keep him in trim? So said everybody who knew him. You couldn't resist his boyish enthusiasm.

II

"And now we'll hear from the young editor," the Major was saying, having lifted high his glass, and sitting down amid ringing applause.

John Darrow got to his feet, not a little embarrassed. He knew he would be called upon to tell what he hoped to make of the *Arcadian,* and though he had prepared a little talk in his mind, he suffered from nervousness, as every sensitive person does when he speaks, even though it be to a group of friends.

But what he had to say came from his heart, and it was not so difficult to talk of this newly born child, this magazine that was to be his, nourished by him, brought up by him, guided and sustained by his young hand. There would be a chance for everyone within its pages. Half the joy of editing was to discover the promising writer, the coming artist; and great names would not have a better chance than those still unknown. He had his dreams, his ideals. He wanted each contributor to express himself as he chose, regardless of "policy"—the *Arcadian* would have no policy at all, save a hope to make the public happier. Could there be a nobler impulse behind any periodical? Major Moulton was going to give him every assistance, financially; and the editorial department would try to prove its worth. The business office,

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guided by Mr. Templeton, would, he felt sure, do its utmost too; and they would all form one cemented family. There would be no house divided against itself, no crumbling of the walls, the cornerstone of which had been laid by the Major. He dreamed of a periodical that would be a credit to America, an inspiration to every young writer who had long hoped for a place where he could express himself freely, unhindered by all those petty restrictions so common in the magazine world. At least there would be one fearless forum in the country, one editor who would have the courage to print essays and poetry, as well as fiction and editorials.

It was a modest enough little conversation, rather than a speech, and it sounded the keynote of the evening. Martin Shaftsbury, struck by John's reference to poetry and essays, leaped enthusiastically to his feet before anyone had a chance to call upon him—he had taken six cocktails in the drawing-room—and was loud in his praise of the young editor.

"We need men like John Darrow at the helm!" he cried. "And now, at last, there will be one periodical in the world where poets may be born—*and* paid!"

Then Templeton arose—an earnest-minded man of thirty-six or so, tall and gaunt, with hair as black as midnight, and a jaw that spoke of an indomitable will. It was obvious that he was going to take his new job seriously; that there wasn't a smile concealed anywhere within that opaque countenance. He was the kind of person who alludes to dinner as supper; but one's endurance was reached when he called supper, lunch.

He was sure that the business department was the bone and sinew of any magazine property; and he was equally confident that he could gather in subscriptions readily; they would have a hundred thou' on their list before long—of course he meant a hundred thousand;

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his office would "function" and "prove O. K."; meetings of the Board, taking place in his office, would come to be "a necessary and fundamental part of the energizing effort that makes for success." He ambled down primrose paths of oratory, waving his hands now and then, delighted with the sound of that deep bass voice which invariably belongs to a raven-haired man. He was repeatedly "confident" and "pleased to note" and "wished to stress the point" and "desired to warn his hearers"—a bringer of the gospel of business, a disciple of the old school of bunk. His face was a masque—one could not tell what he really thought. He smiled only with his mouth, never with his eyes; and a Chinaman concealed his feelings with no greater shrewdness.

His little wife, a mere wisp of a woman who always wore unbecoming browns and greens, watched him proudly, and nodded approval at every other sentence. She knew how ambitious he was—she, too, had high hopes. She felt that they knew, between them, more of the "average reader" than anyone in the nervous East. She was determined to get in on the reading of manuscripts, if she could. She just loved literature, and once in high school back home she had won a prize for an essay on "How It Feels to be Sweet Sixteen." It had been her undoing. She knew that heaven had intended her to be a writer; and she saw visions now of her little poems and stories appearing in the *Arcadian*.

The Major liked H. S. Templeton; he felt that he was sound at the core, just the type of level-headed business man who could be a check upon flighty editorial temperaments. One needed such a stabilizing influence in any office; and though John Darrow was all right in his way, Templeton was just as right in *his*. The Major had been struck by a phrase of Templeton's when they had first talked together. "It's all right to get out a high-

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class periodical," he remarked, "which will appeal to a choice few; but by George, Major, you must remember that to make money you've got to appeal to the woman in the wrapper!"

The woman in the wrapper! He understood, then, the great middle class, just as his wife did; and he would be invaluable for that reason alone. He hired him at once, and told him to select his own force of assistants at so much per month.

And so the ship was launched, with many bottles of champagne that evening, in the Major's house on West Forty-seventh street. Shaftsbury and Beulah hadn't had so fine a dinner in many a month; and the big poet stumbled down the steps quoting Omar, and part of his own ode in the first number of the *Arcadian*. He cried out that "The hounds of Spring were on Winter's traces," and other Swinburnian lines, which suddenly got all tangled up with Omar; then, reeling to the waiting cab, he told the old driver that Browning—no, Shelley, no, Keats, *Keats, Keith*—was the greatest poet since Shakespeare, and wasn't life wonderful? Somehow they helped him into the cab, his infinitesimal wife beside him, holding his head, followed by John Darrow, who of course paid the bill.

It was a wild, joyful night; and they all slept late the next day. The Major understood perfectly that youth must have its fling, and he would rather have everybody rest at home than come to the office with bloodshot eyes and grouchy tempers.

And a golden year rushed by for the staff that got together that night. It was one of the happiest periods in John Darrow's life. He literally drank New York, ate it up, almost gobbled it whole; and sometimes he paused in the midst of a good time and wondered what he had done to have all this richness and fulness come to him.

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He was one of those rare souls who can stand on the peak of noon and realize that they are young and ecstatic and filled with dreams, and never worry about how long the radiance will last.

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CHAPTER III

I

THE morning after Agnes Stanhurst's party, the office boy came into John Darrow's office and announced that Mr. Shaftsbury wanted to see him. "He looks somethin' awful," Peter warned. He knew every contributor, and acted as a tactful Cerberus, experienced beyond his years. It was said that he could tell a novelist from a short-story writer at a glance, and knew by the look of a visitor's coat whether he had a poem concealed in his pocket—and whether it would prove available.

"Show him in," John said, and dismissed his stenographer, to whom he had been dictating.

The hulking form of the poet came through the door in another moment, and when John looked at him he was aware that he had one of his shaky hang-overs. He didn't like him in this condition.

"Damn it, I'm ashamed of myself," was Shaftsbury's unexpected greeting. "Made a fool of myself again last night. Sorry, old boy." And he held out his hand, which was trembling. His eyes were inflamed, and, in the bright light of the office, his features stood out clearly. He was handsome, even now. The strong nose, the sensual mouth, and the full cheeks were familiar enough to John. This morning the poet's face needed the attention of a razor—it was seldom indeed that he neglected the sacrament of shaving, for he was vain of his appearance. He noted John's glance at the sprouting reddish

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beard, and rubbed one hand over his countenance apologetically. "Wanted to get here early, so didn't bother to shave," he said. He had a habit of omitting words when he was in this nervous condition, and it made his conversation sound like a woman's hurried letter.

"Oh, don't bother to tell me," the editor graciously said. "I'd forgotten about last night, Martin. You forget it, too."

"Decent of you," the other answered. "Damned decent, John. . . . Now look here," fishing in his coat, "you didn't hear my poem when I read it, so I brought it in for you to see now. It's the *best* thing I've done lately. And oh, God, John, I need some cash!" Now, when he got down to business, he omitted no word to make his meaning clear. He put his hand out and wrapped his arm affectionately about Darrow's shoulder. The gesture was so unusual that the editor was a little surprised. Martin's need must be great to cause this demonstration. His nerves, maybe, accounted for much.

"How long is it?" John asked. It was an unfortunate question. The poet immediately flamed up.

"*You* ask that!" Shaftsbury cried, his voice booming out so that those in the neighboring office could hear every word if they listened. "And you pretend to write poetry yourself! Shame on you, John Darrow!" He was the querulous man of last night. "As if the length of a thing were anything to a poet! It's as long as it should be—not a line longer. I never write for money, and you know it!" The old fire came in his bloodshot eyes, and he shook back his heavy hair.

"But sometimes an editor has to consider length," John tried to make it clear. "Moreover——"

"There you go!" Martin cried. "'Moreover' always means trouble—like a telegram. What I want to know is, do you want my poem, or don't you? Quick!"

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John pushed out a chair for his visitor. "Do sit down, Martin. You ought to know that I have my problems, just as you have yours. If this were a short lyric, I'd grab it from you at once; but what's the use of beating about the bush? The business office——"

"Oh, damn the business office! Templeton again, I suppose!" yelled Shaftsbury.

John got up and closed the door. Then he turned on his visitor. He was not one to be easily aroused; yet when he was, he changed completely.

"Look here," he said. "We've been mighty good friends up till last night, Martin. I've been a particularly good friend of yours in my editorial capacity. Oh, I don't want to take any credit for 'bringing you out.' I'm not going to patronize you—I couldn't do that. But what I do mean to say is that you're getting too damned fond of yourself; and you think that because you write exquisite poetry you can come around to editors and curse them. You can't—here. And you can't run down that same business office of which you just spoke so slurringly. It isn't to be despised so much when it's pay-day, is it?" He smiled a little. "I've often noticed that the artistic temperament can become very matter-of-fact when there's a check to be cashed. I honestly don't see why writers have to be different from other people."

Shaftsbury listened in amazement. John Darrow had always been noted for his quiet, unassuming manner. He had never been known to be ungracious, to tell unpleasant truths. What did this mean? Was his head being turned? Was his success with the *Arcadian* spoiling him, robbing him of that simplicity which was so great a part of his charm? If it was, he, Shaftsbury would bring him back to earth!

"You're a fool to talk like this," he said now. "You

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are patronizing me, and every other literary man when you say such things. We're not the fools you think us," his eyes gleamed. "Are you going to read my poem, or aren't you? That's all I want to know this morning." His tone was almost insolent. He could be beautifully and sarcastically rude. It was Mortie Langdon who had said that Shaftsbury could get away with more insults than anyone he knew; but one of his repentant scrawls the next day, exquisitely worded, would win the most prejudiced back again. He meant to keep a collection of such letters and telegrams (there were no less than fifty of them already in existence) and publish them when Shaftsbury died.

John looked at him now with pity. "You're nervous and shaky, Martin," he said. "What you need is one drink to straighten you up, and then a good luncheon and a rest."

"How am I going to get a drink—much less a luncheon?" the poet inquired. "I'm broke, damn it, and you know it! Lend me ten dollars, won't you? Or read my poem, and tell your damned cashier to give me the cash for it now." He sat down, put his foot on the side of John's desk, and swung his stick in the air.

"You beat anyone I've ever known," Darrow said. "You know my dislike of reading a manuscript while the author sits with me. Moreover——"

"Humph! There you go again with one of those 'moreovers.' Say, what's this sudden change in you? You used to take my stuff almost before you'd looked at it."

"That's one of the things I was going to talk over with you, only you became so blamed impertinent. The business office——"

"Ha! The secret's out! *They're* running things now—not you! Isn't that it?" He laughed in triumph. "Not

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so much of an editor, after all! Just like all the rest of 'em—have to obey orders from the financial interests! Moulton going back on you, old man?"

"Don't be a jackass, Martin. But there are lots of things I could make clear to you if I had the time."

"So you won't read my poem, and you won't let me have ten dollars?" Shaftsbury said.

"I'll take you to lunch at the Players," Darrow compromised.

"Can't go there."

"Why not?"

"Beulah's outside. Was going to take her to Mouquin's."

"Why the devil didn't you bring her in? Nice thing, to keep your wife sitting out in the waiting-room!" He pressed a button, and Peter came at once. "Show Mrs. Shaftsbury in here," Darrow said.

"Say," the poet leaned forward to urge, "slip me a ten spot before she gets in, won't you? I honestly need it." And, hypnotized, John passed him a crisp bill which the other shoved into his pocket just as Beulah, looking tired and dejected, was ushered into their presence.

"I had no idea you were out there," John apologized. "Martin didn't tell me until now." He held out his hand. "Won't you both come and lunch with me?"

"He won't buy my poem," Martin complained, like a sullen schoolboy at once, "but he'll take us to lunch! Let's go, Beulah."

"All right," his wife answered. "I'd love to, John." Somehow he sensed that she had had no breakfast. There were shadows beneath her pretty blue eyes. She looked older than he had ever seen her. He got his hat in an instant, shoved some manuscripts into a basket on the side of his desk, and led them out to the elevator.

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II

That night John was to dine with Constance, early. They decided to get a quiet table, upstairs, in Browne's Chop House, so that she would have as much time as possible with him before she went to the theatre.

He had come to love these intimate little dinners with the English girl. They had known each other now for six weeks—right after her success; and a comradeship had sprung up at once. John loved the stage, and one day he hoped to write for it—if he ever made enough money to quit editing and devote all his time to writing. That was the dream in the back of his head—the dream that perpetually remained there and would not be routed. But in the meantime, a little check had to be sent home every month—his father had not left much when he died two years before—merely a life insurance which his mother found ready use for. One had to live decently; and though he had rebelled at his long stay in Brooklyn with the Deeleys, it had saved him many dollars. The fact that Mary Gwynne had never come back—how could he ever get over the shock of that?—preyed on him, and he never could bring himself to take his meals at Mrs. Thompson's after the message came that poor little quiet Mary had been so cruelly killed. The thought of sitting at that table where they had spent so many happy hours, of going out on the stoop, remembering the times they had loitered there, drove him from the house; and for a trifling sum the Deeleys managed to take him in as a full-fledged boarder. Old Tom never came down to the basement dining-room after his serious attack; and for three long years John remained with them, his weekly twelve dollars tiding them over a disastrous period. Nick had worked harder than ever, brought to a realization of his responsibilities; but there were times

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when he scooted off mysteriously. It was then that Mrs. Deeley would lean all the harder on John, and he could not escape being the real man of the house. He had had it out with them, however, as to his doing his own work on Sundays. If he stayed on, he told Mrs. Deeley, he must be left absolutely alone. He could not fret himself with arguments on religion. They must clearly understand that he was the best judge of what was right or wrong; and through tear-stained eyes the poor woman assured him that if he would only stay on. . . . Yes, anything he said would go; they had never meant to be rude to him; and Nick needed him, too, and oh, God, how they needed his board and lodging money.

The Miller girls moved away from Nostrand Avenue shortly afterwards. Their mother had died suddenly, of apoplexy, while she was leaning on that window-sill where she watched her little world go by; and he lost all trace of them. They were said to be in New York, but no one was sure; and after the scene on the beach Nick was delicate about mentioning them. They gave up the Brooklyn choir; and in the hodge-podge and hurried shuffling of people in great cities, John, with all he had to do, gave them little thought. He had been heartbroken over Mary's death, and it was months before he could get back to sanity. He simply wished to be let alone; and a solid month at Stockton did much to relieve his strained nerves. He sent his editorials (which Mrs. Morgan continued lightly to sign) and Caleb Buncey had forwarded such manuscripts as needed his attention. For the rest, he tried to put some thoughts on paper; and he learned at this period of his career that there is nothing so stimulating to the artist as some devastating experience. His grief had crushed him, but it had also added something that could not be named to his poetry. He wrote a group of sonnets that were

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published in sequence in one of the better magazines, and were quoted throughout the country. He almost arrived—not quite. He was not ready for a volume as yet. That would come. There need be no haste.

He was thinking of those days in Brooklyn as he walked up the street tonight, to call for Constance. How much had happened to him, and how the chain that bound him to duty had slowly lengthened, until he was almost unconscious of its existence. The hum of the city around him—he was definitely a part of it now—always thrilled him. There was a sense of achievement here, a new rapture with every new day; and the joy of getting away from the crude little *Banner* and finding a footing with such a publication as the *Arcadian* sent the blood singing through his veins. There were moments when he was achingly happy, when the world was a great globe of light for him. But was it a bubble, after all, to be pricked again? Well, he had "youth's strong armor to defy the years," and no one could rob him of his dreams and ambitions. Only a few streets away a beautiful girl was waiting for him, and after he took her to dine there would be a glorious evening, alone, with Keats and Epictetus before an open fire, and the wind blowing a gale over his roof. Ah! there were worse things than being young, and a bit in love!

III

She had never looked lovelier. When she was going to the theatre to play, she wore simple frocks and hats. Tonight she had on a black velvet turban, from the confines of which her brown locks sought valiantly to escape, and a clinging bodice of some soft material that a man loves but does not try to comprehend. It was cut to reveal her delicate throat, and he hated to help her on with her fur cloak because it hid, momentarily, the

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beauty of her flesh. He liked the way she put on her gloves as she talked to him—those gloves that crinkled at the wrist (why did he like them to do that?) and why did they seem more crinkly on *her* wrists?

"How beautiful you look tonight, Connie," he said.

There isn't a woman in the world who does not thrill at that compliment. She flushed, and answered in the immemorial way.

"Oh, you're fooling me!" and went on buttoning her gloves. "Here, help me with this one," she said, and pushed one wrist toward him. And there isn't a man in the world who does not thrill at *that* compliment.

The nearness to her, the suggestion of perfume on her garments, the wonder of her sheer womanliness made his head swim.

"Why does anyone *write* poems, when such a poem is in the world?" he looked into her eyes and said.

"John, you've never yet written a poem to me—I never saw your handwriting until this afternoon, and what a scrawl it is!" He was mystified. "But thanks awfully for the card, brief as it was. And for the orchids."

She went into another room and brought them out—delicate, fragile pale-blue gossamer; and John Darrow stood gazing at her, and at them, unable to say one word. Was she serious? He had sent her roses and violets many times, without a line; but he never sent anyone orchids—he didn't like them, and he wondered why anyone did.

"I'll put them on tonight—they're glorious," she continued. "How did you know I cared for them so?"

"I didn't," he managed to get out at last. "Let me see the card, won't you?" Of course he had guessed that many men were trying to know her better, were flattering her and sending her gifts. It is every beautiful woman's prerogative to have presents lavished upon her,

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and she comes to take them for granted, much as a flower accepts the dew, and thinks little of it.

She fetched the card. There were only five words upon it: "From the poet, with affection."

A hideous scrawl! He knew the writing at once. She was watching him. At first he was dumbfounded; then his sense of humor came to his rescue, and he burst out laughing.

"What is so amusing about it?" she inquired.

"Don't you know?" he asked. "You met him only last night. It's Martin Shaftsbury, of course!"

And he knew where his ten dollars had gone! How like the irrepressible and sentimental Martin! This great gift of inarticulate beauty which told, after all, of his spendthrift heart!

Then John thought of Beulah, and her husband's unsold poem; and he wondered if she would have any dinner that night. At any rate, he had given them a luncheon fit for Lucullus; and that thought sustained him, even if the repast could not sustain the poet's little wife but a few more hours.

IV

Adolph had got so that he looked for them. Frequently they came here, and he always reserved the corner table. This young stage beauty from England, sitting beneath an old-fashioned photograph of Clara Morris in "Article 47" appealed far more to him. How refreshing it was to look upon a radiant living actress, instead of upon the portraits of those dead and gone, or vanished from the footlights' glare! He fussed about them, but never obtrusively. He was one of those rare waiters who can submerge themselves, and yet be forever within call.

"Some day I'm going to write a play for you," John was saying tonight; and Adolph, who overheard, though

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he was not eavesdropping, thrilled. A promising playwright, as well as an editor, then! Ach! life was *wunderschoen!* Lots of celebrities came in here. Now there was another to add to his catalogue. He rubbed his hands in satisfaction, and opened John's baked potato with greater interest than ever, putting in a dash of paprika and plenty of butter. He loved celebrities. Constance, sensibly, had ordered less heavy food.

"You're always talking about your play. The only way, John, is to write it for me. I think you're wasting time editing other people's manuscripts."

"But one must live," he told her. "I have certain expenses, you know. A fellow can't just start out and write, with nothing ahead."

"That's true; but there must be a way. Sometimes I feel that if you dropped it all—this drudgery at the office, and ventured—"

"It isn't drudgery, Constance. Editing's a profession, after all. I love it."

"Don't you like writing more?"

He looked down at his chop. Of course he liked writing more—his verse was the most important thing in his life; to be in the throes of composition lifted him out of the world, made him another being. It does not matter that one's poetry is minor—the exaltation is there, just the same. And until one has felt that sharp joy of putting words on paper, watching them grow beneath his hand until a page is filled with lines that sing, he does not know what delight is. To see beneath life, as well as through it and around it—that is the poet's privilege; and his clairvoyance atones for all the bitterness of existence.

"There is only one thing greater than writing," he said.

"What's that?"

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"Loving." He said it very low. He dared not look at her.

She did not reply for a moment. Adolph had gone away. John's eyes still drooped over his plate; but once he had the courage to look up, and he saw her lovely face beneath the velvet hat. One curl, a violent Radical, refusing to conform to the dictates of the comb, had wandered away from its less imaginative friends, and was peeping from the rim. It seemed to say, "I want to see what's going on out here! I won't be bound up with my fellows. I must be free to do as I wish!" Like all rebels, every now and then it had to obey some rule; and John was amused to see it disappear now when Constance lifted her hand nervously and shoved it back in its place. Yet in a moment it bounced forth again, frantic for self-expression. There was no taming it; so finally Constance gave up, and let it have its wicked little way. "You're right—there's nothing so worth while as—loving," came from her at last.

Neither of them had used the word before, even indirectly, and each was a little embarrassed.

Adolph fetched cream ale for John—Constance never drank before a performance. They were both brought back to the room through his sudden presence.

John looked up, and caught her eyes.

"I know you're glad I didn't wear his flowers," Constance said.

"You didn't take them seriously?" he asked.

"No. But I liked the thought. Who wouldn't?"

John smiled. If she only knew that he had paid for the orchids!

"You really care a little, then?"

"Indeed I do, John. Funny, too, when we've known each other so short a time. A man like Mr. Shaftsbury would never appeal to me."

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"Isn't there someone—back home?" he wanted to know.

Constance paused the fraction of a second, and then looked him straight in the eyes.

"No. There's not a soul I care for—deeply."

"Not even me?"

"I couldn't care deeply, so soon," she frankly said. "I'm slow about such things."

"Then you've felt this way before?"

"Of course! What a goose you are! Every girl, who's at all nice, and—attractive—has hundreds of men —fall in love with her. We get to expect it. Why shouldn't we?"

"Why not, indeed?" But he didn't like the thought of that long procession of vague men who had been on the line of march before him. Was this the first symptom? Could it be that . . . How wonderful it was, sitting here with her so intimately. Was he sure of her? A girl in her position must be deluged with attentions from men—from all sorts of men, some of them doubtless very fascinating. After all, could he hope to win special favor among so many? Would she give him any real hope? Could a fellow marry on his prospects? She was established; he was but beginning—yet she was younger than he. Would it be wise to fall in love with a potential celebrity? Yet how could one of his temperament control such things? He didn't want to. He always said that marriage must come, inevitably; one walked toward it, he remembered reading in a French philosopher's book, as naturally as one walks toward Death. It was part of the great scheme of things. How could one live without Romance? Who wanted to go a barren way, when all the honey of life was just around the corner? It would be beautiful to drift and dream. . . . Her voice roused him.

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"Tell me about the play."

He took up his fork. "It won't take me long." He leaned over the table. She saw the eagerness in his eyes. Many young writers had come to her in London, and she had been so sorry for them all. That look of faith in oneself—she knew it well. But John Darrow would be different; he would have something worth while. But she did hope it wouldn't be a poetic drama!

She might have saved her fears. He began to outline a smart comedy, in which she was to play a young woman of the world, with two entanglements that finally got her into an unforeseen difficulty. He punctuated his story with epigrams he intended to use.

"Write that down!" Constance would interrupt him to say. "You'll forget it if you don't . . . Adolph, a pencil and paper!" she cried. And when John wouldn't jot something down, she would. His story was delightful. It was of the moment; and if he could write the dialogue as he told it, she was certain the critics would spread the knews that a new young playwright had arrived.

"You mean a new star," he laughed. "If it's any good at all, you'll make it better. It's *your* play, Connie. I'd never have thought of it—if I hadn't met you."

She knew he meant that. "You *must* write it, John. Begin this very night, after I go to the theatre. The whole thing is clear in your mind, and it's merely a matter of application, isn't it? Just think what fun it will be when we get into rehearsals!"

She even talked of the scenery, the costumes she would wear in each act, what theatre they would open in. London might be better than New York—she was better known there; and then she could sail into the American metropolis and storm the town. She had never been so enthusiastic about a comedy. She wanted it right away.

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She would speak to her manager when she left John, or perhaps cable London. But he must promise—yes, he must promise to begin work that very evening. Nothing was more important. He'd make a fortune—both would make a fortune, and then—he could write the poetry he had always wanted to write, with large leisure, in an old garden, and peace, and tranquillity—the ancient dreams that youth forever dreams, and proves how little it knows of the ways of the world.

He had given her his word that he would start in that very night. When he left her at the stage entrance, he fully intended to abandon Keats and Epictetus and write the magic words of his title on a clean sheet of paper.

"Remember, this very evening!" were her final words, parting from him at the stage entrance on Fortieth street.

The Avenue was a long lane of blue globes, which reminded him of moonstones hanging from a queen's ears. The hard snow flakes glittered like a billion stars, and the hush of the usually busy thoroughfare gave him a sense of the wonder of this terrible city. How he had come to love it—and hate it! For though he saw its magnificence, also, being a poet, he felt its sordidness and cruelty; and never did he tread the finest streets but his thoughts went to those shameful hovels of the poor where terror forever walks and penury is one's daily companion.

But oh, the loveliness of this starlit street tonight! A hansom lurched against the snowbanks. A pedestrian, muffled and bending low, plodded through the drifts, and the crunch of cart-wheels as they hit the ice was a song in his ears. To think that he was part of this thrilling town—that he belonged here, that he had made so many friends here already! His blood sang in his veins, and the rich future spread out before him like a panorama. Yes! he would fight the good fight, he would

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go on to greater things, he would write his play for Constance, and this Avenue would one day ring with his name, the whole city would know of him! It was splendid just to be alive; it was glorious to be young.

His feet moved firmly on the brittle sidewalk. The lighted clubs and the sleeping shops seemed to whisper to him as he passed along. And what they said was, "Work! It is the greatest thing in the world!"

When he arrived at his rooms, near Madison Square, there was a message for him from Major Moulton, asking him to come at once to his house. There was something important he wanted to talk over with him. Templeton was already there. Take a cab and hurry around.

The play—everything—was forgotten.

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CHAPTER IV

I

MAJOR MOULTON had a way of calling conferences at unexpected hours. The magazine was only a toy to him, and it was much more sensible to play with a toy in one's own home than in the Madison Square offices. His wife put pillows all around him; and, dressed in a wonderful black velvet dressing-gown he would loll back on a couch before the fireplace upstairs, a long strong cigar in his mouth, his wife reading to him, or engaged on a bit of embroidery. The whiskey was always conveniently near —the Major loved his nip of Scotch just before bed-time—and he was at peace with the whole world, when suddenly he would think of his toy, and experience a mad desire to have it make noises for him. Balloons were no good unless you blew them up once in a while; and a mechanical plaything had to be wound before it would go. Why not summon Templeton—H. S., as he was always called—or John Darrow, or perhaps both, or even poor Englehardt in the Subscription Department, and mull over the prospects, consider the staff, and see if the advertising appropriation should be increased or diminished? It was like playing with blocks or dominoes. A fascinating game.

"Now, Majormoulton, you ought to stay still tonight," his young and cautious wife would frequently say. But with two long Scotch-and-sodas under his dressing-gown, the Major was wide awake, and his gray eyes, shadowed

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by heavy brows, would burn with a desire to see someone who worked for him. His big white mustache would lift when he pouted, and he would beg to be allowed to do as he wished. Having bossed everyone all his life, paradoxically, he liked to be bossed a little now by this bit of femininity who had done him the honor of becoming his wife. He always capitulated to her; but she knew how to manage him—by letting him seem to have his own way. Whenever she wanted anything herself, she made a sly suggestion—just a hint, mind you; put a flea in his ear, as it were, and then forgot about it—or pretended to forget. Ten minutes later the idea would pop out of the Major's head as though it had been born there, and she would meekly fall in with his desires.

When she said she wanted him to stay still, she really knew that he wished to be active, and she liked to let him think that she was giving in to him. She didn't mind in the least whether he called a meeting or not on this particular night. She had read until her throat ached. Moreover, she found it great fun to listen to the plans for the *Arcadian*—she never left the room when these hurried conferences were taking place. Indeed, often she held the Major's hand while he talked, and he puffed and groaned contentedly like an old lion, growled a bit, and between his teeth begged for one more highball. Tonight, just as he was speaking about a conference, the bell rang, and H. S. Templeton was announced. "Did you ever!" said the Major, puffing and blowing like the pig in the fairy-tale, "well, well! Send him right up here!"

"Now, Majormoulton, don't you exert yourself too much." He loved to be told that he was overdoing, and she knew it. As a matter of fact, he was a rather lazy old man.

H. S. (what his full name was nobody had ever found

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out) came blackly and bleakly into the firelit room. He seemed to bring something of the winter night with him.

"Good evening, Mrs. Moulton," he said in his stiff way. "*Good* evening, Major." And a cadaverous hand was extended to each. He liked the intimacy of this room, and the feeling of importance it gave him to be able to run in this way and discuss business.

"There were one or two things I thought I'd like to talk over with you," he stated, as he drew up a comfortable chair and then leaned forward to warm himself at the hearth.

"Certainly. Glad you came in, H. S. Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, no. All quiet along the Potomac." That was one of his stock remarks. He said it as though it were original with him.

"That's good." The Major lay back again—he had half risen.

H. S. coughed—the kind of cough that precedes an unpleasant speech. "I wanted to speak particularly about the way Mr. Darrow is buying poetry—long poems, I mean—for the magazine."

"Darrow buying long poems? He's *always* bought long poems. I think it's a good thing."

"I think it's a mistake to buy so many of them," H. S. ventured. "They cost money, you know." He coughed again, ever so slightly, and gazed into the fire, as though in deep thought.

"They break up the pages—that was the idea as I saw it," the proprietor of the *Arcadian* said. "Lots of type in the magazine, you know—heavy type, too. Good to break up the stories and articles now and then with narrative poems. I told Darrow to do it. Well?"

He didn't exactly like the idea of H. S. coming to see him about Darrow, when the latter was not present.

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"Well," H. S. said, calmly, not looking around, "all I can say is that I think it's a waste of your good money, Major."

"But you ain't the editor," the Major said, forgetting his grammar for a moment. When he was excited he frequently forgot his grammar.

"Now, Majormoulton, don't get excited," his wife warned him, and patted the hand nearest her. He beamed on her, and he was unashamed of this open love-making.

"I know that," H. S. stated, not in the least perturbed by the Major's implication. "But sometimes I think—" he stopped short and rubbed his thin hands before the fire. No, he'd better not say what he was going to say.

"Maybe we'd best send for John Darrow," Major Moulton suggested. "Fanny, won't you ring for Mary, and have her 'phone his house? Maybe he's in, readin' manuscripts. There's a pile of 'em comin' in these days." He liked the picture he created of a busy editorial office.

"We could get lots of shorter poems—cheap," H. S. said. "My wife, now—h'm—she writes very good verses: but Darrow won't take a thing of hers. I think that's a mistake, Major."

"Damn it, *I* don't!" the Major said. "Darrow ought to have full sway. And he ought to know what's what in poetry, seein' he writes the stuff himself! Don't feel hurt if he turns down some of Mrs. H. S.'s poems. He's got the good of us all at heart. I know that."

"Maybe you'd like me to show you some of the things Darrow's rejected," H. S. suggested, and made a motion as though he would take something from his pocket.

"No, no! I'll have to trust his judgment, H. S. Wouldn't be fair if I didn't. That's what I hire him for. Shaftsbury's a hit, always, and I don't think we can have too much of his work."

"But there are others. I've been thinking the maga-

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zine's getting a little *too* good, if you know what I mean," H. S. insisted. "Remember the woman in the wrapper, the little home town, the simple people who are really our bread and butter. Eh, Major?"

"Well—I don't know. We're swingin' along all right. Let's let well enough alone, H. S.," the Major replied.

In less than an hour John was among them.

II

He had the sense that H. S., whom he had never quite liked, was "putting something over on him." When he gathered, from a remark of the Major's, that the business manager had dropped in without being sent for, he was suspicious at once. It was the first time there had been the slightest feeling between them—that is, any definite feeling. H. S. was a type he could not wholly admire. He was always going about the office, seeing what the clerks and readers were doing—a young Caleb Buncey. John had finally come to the conclusion that such people were part of the necessary paraphernalia of any organization. They kept things in motion; but as for himself, he preferred taking no hand in their operations. They were like company sergeants. The men hated them, and their superior officers had just a tinge of disrespect for their methods.

"About these long poems," the Major said. "H. S. seems to think we are buyin' too many of them." He was careful to say "we," not "you." It softened the criticism.

"I hadn't thought much of it, until this very day," Darrow said.

"Yes; Shaftsbury was in again, wasn't he?" H. S. remarked. "And didn't he ask for an advance on a manuscript?"

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John didn't like this. He recalled that the door of his office had remained open much of the time that Martin was with him. H. S. must have been in the outer room, prowling about, as usual.

"Shaftsbury is one of our most necessary contributors," Darrow offered. He refused to say anything more. If there was to be any criticism, let the others make it. He was anxious to see if H. S. would put his cards on the table.

"Oh, I know that," the Major said. "An' Fanny an' I both like his ballads, don't we, Fanny?"

"Then we'll run some more of them," John laughed. "I think lots of people like them."

"I'm not so sure about that," H. S. stated, oracularly. "My mother-in-law says she can't always understand them."

John couldn't help laughing. H. S. caught the smile.

"Oh, you needn't laugh," the General Manager cried, leaning forward in his chair, and stretching out his long hands to the blaze. "She's the great average reader, you know."

"Wears a wrapper, I suppose," John said. He couldn't help it. The old phrase leaped out.

"Don't sneer, now," H. S. warned.

Mrs. Moulton didn't like his tone. "Mr. Darrow isn't sneering, H. S." She, too, called him that. "And what if he did? He's the editor, you know." She looked over at John, and he knew that she thoroughly backed him up. They had always gotten on well together. Scarcely once had she rejected anything that he wanted to use.

"Yes, that's true," H. S. carefully agreed. He did not wish to offend the Major's wife in any way. He knew which side his bread was buttered on. "But some of the magazines have a Board of Editors; and I was thinking. . . ."

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The glance John gave him completely shut him up.

"I think it's for Major Moulton to decide just how the magazine is to be edited, H. S." Then he turned to his employer. "Did you wish to discuss this subject tonight, Major? If so, we have plenty of time." He was angry. He didn't quite know what H. S. was driving at. What had happened? Was it possible that the Manager was growing jealous of him, and wanted to usurp some of his growing power? In a brief year so much could happen. If this was the case—if it was really a petty jealousy —the matter had better be threshed out here and now. He recalled his polite rejection of Mrs. Templeton's school-girl effusions. That was probably at the root of any ill-feeling her husband might now be entertaining. Well, he could fight that out. It was too silly to argue about it, and he hoped the delicate subject would not be brought up. John Darrow was no fool. He knew, as editor, that he had certain inalienable rights; that it was personality that made or unmade a magazine, and he went over rapidly in his mind those periodicals which were acknowledged successes. All of them were edited by one person. The Board idea got you nowhere. Meetings of committees invariably ended with nothing accomplished. The Advertising Director would say to the Editorial Director, at the end of such a meeting, "Well, let's decide all that next week. I'll tell you what you do: you get your group together in the meantime, and I'll get mine, and then we'll have another talk and see where we stand." The result was that they stood nowhere. Everyone was afraid to shoulder the blame; but someone always wanted to reap whatever personal reward might accrue. A farce, the whole wretched business.

"I don't know, exactly," the Major answered John's question. "Seems to me things have been runnin' along all right—don't you think so, Fanny?" he added, turning

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lovingly to his young wife, who was, as ever, close at his side, stroking his hand. He was still reclining on the sofa.

"Yes, indeedy," Mrs. Moulton affirmed. "But maybe H. S. had something to suggest that we haven't heard yet?"

This was just what John wanted—to have Templeton's hand forced. He imagined the Moultons were his staunch allies; but he couldn't gather yet what H. S.'s game was. Surely Templeton was not his open enemy. He watched him now, as he faced the bright fire. His hair had been slickly combed and looked more raven-like than ever; and the long hands were constantly moving, nervously. He did not lift his eyes for a long time. He seemed to be considering deeply how he would begin to say something that he didn't quite like—or dare—to say.

"Well, Major," he said at length, without once taking his eyes off the flames, and pushing his chair back a bit, crossing his thin legs and building his hands into the form of a high pyramid, each finger separated. As he continued, he would lightly and rapidly beat the balls of his fingers together—a mannerism which John abominated. The foot that was crossed would move up and down, too, and H. S.'s words came like a sing-song, and the Adam's apple in his throat would emerge now and then from his collar to be a necessary part of the rhythmic measure. He looked like a living chaise-lounge, John Darrow thought, as he thus stretched out.

"Well, Major," H. S. repeated, "I hate to say so, but the subscriptions have been falling off lately—oh, not much," he added hastily, as he was conscious that his employer half rose from the couch. "But enough to make me do some serious thinking."

H. S. knew how to get his effects. This piece of news would fall like a thunderbolt into the room. Inwardly

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he rejoiced at his own histrionic ability. It was his purpose to frighten the trio before him.

"Don't get excited," Mrs. Moulton said, gently pushing her husband back on the sofa. She fortified him with a little more whiskey. But John Darrow never moved. He had always felt that Templeton was something of an alarmist. Now he was certain of it.

"I know we've put all the money we need into a subscription campaign," H. S. went on. "The blame cannot be placed upon the business office. We've done all we could, God knows. What we need, as I see it, if the whole enterprise is to function properly," he went on, sliding naturally into his favorite phrases, and now very much at home with them, "is a survey of the whole organization. First: (A finger shot up.) Have we been over-buying? Second: (Another finger arose.) Has the business office been doing all it should to curtail? Third: (Still another finger followed the first two into the air.) Should we not engage a live young Subscription Manager to take care of a Spring campaign, under my direction? These, Major Moulton, it seems to me, are pressing problems to be carefully considered, if your property is to sail along as it has been sailing."

He paused; and the fingers that had helped to bring his points home returned to their proper places, and again beat rhythmically together. Darrow thought he had never seen a more self-satisfied man.

"What would you do with Englehardt?" the Major wanted to know. He was always loyal to those in his employ.

"Let him go!" was Templeton's immediate answer; and John's heart sank, for he liked old Englehardt, and knew that he had a wife and four children over in New Jersey.

"What?" the Major shouted, rising completely. His wife tried to push him back, but in vain. His feet were

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planted firmly on the floor, and his hair was a little tousled from its contact with the pillow.

"Well," H. S. immediately compromised, "we could afford to keep him on at a small wage" (he liked this word, in the context, better than "salary." It sounded like a heavy retrenchment, somehow gave the effect that he, Templeton, was diligently guarding the pay-roll.) "But I have a plan for getting new readers, which I would like to talk over in detail at a Board meeting, Major. Perhaps you would be so good as to call such a meeting, say—tomorrow? I would like the Editorial Department to be represented, of course. I'll go over the manuscript inventory carefully then, and ascertain if we are over-paying and over-buying——"

John had been listening intently. He could not resist cutting in at this last word.

"There has been no over-buying," he said, both to the Major and to H. S. Templeton.

H. S. coughed. "Well, perhaps not exactly over-buying, Mr. Darrow, but maybe—well, I hardly know how to put it—perhaps a little extravagance in the matter of advances on manuscripts not yet delivered."

The Major looked surprised; so did Mrs. Moulton. This, too, was a thunderbolt. To pay for something before it had even been written? Unthinkable.

"I'm sure the Editorial Department has not done that," Darrow said. "You need not worry, Major Moulton. Mr. Templeton has been misinformed. That's all."

"That will come up at tomorrow's meeting," H. S. continued. "You can't deny that one of your contributors asked for an advance, can you?"

John saw red for a moment.

"What's that to you, H. S.? It is one thing for an author to ask for an advance, quite another for an editor to acquiesce. You mean Shaftsbury, I suppose? The

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incident of yesterday, perhaps?" He was always direct; he hated beating about the bush.

H. S. coughed again. Now Darrow was sure he had listened to his conversation with the poet.

"Maybe I do," the business manager stated. "But everything can be talked over amicably at tomorrow's meeting." He liked the word "amicably" when he was in the wrong.

"Indeed, everything shall be gone over most carefully, so far as my department is concerned," Darrow stated. Was the fire getting hotter, that he should suddenly flush so? He pushed back from the blaze; but his cheeks still burned, and he was a little ashamed that he couldn't control himself better.

"There is nothing like having things adjusted. We must all co-operate, co-ordinate," H. S. Templeton continued, and on the second syllable of each word a finger beat upon another, and he swayed just a trifle. The sound of his own voice was music to him. He pulled out his handkerchief and fluted it slowly, and then unfluted it with one swift pull.

"I don't like the idea of the added expense of a Circulation man," the Major said, when he had taken another swallow from his glass. "Damned lot of money to spend."

"Ah, Major, I thought you might look at it that way; but it will save you money in the end—you may depend upon me to see to that. I would make no such suggestion unless I were certain I could show results. But as I said, we can talk things over in detail tomorrow." His voice was suave, his manner that of the meek courtier in the presence of his monarch.

"Have you anyone specially in mind for the position?" the Major inquired.

"No; not yet. But I want to find a live young fellow

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with some experience. Perhaps Mr. Darrow could be thinking of someone, and certainly I shall be doing so." He liked to give the impression that he carried the weighty affairs of the office home with him nights, and neither slumbered nor slept when the Major's delicate interests were concerned.

John had the feeling that H. S. was doing everything he could to ingratiate himself with Major Moulton. He knew him to be an ambitious, eel-like man. Once in a while, when he lunched with him, he discovered that he had no little business imagination. He had come from the Middle West, where he had run a small newspaper in a city of 90,000 population; and there were certain sides of the newspaper and magazine game that he had studied assiduously. He admitted his dense ignorance of literature—he let his wife pose as the family intellectual; but he contended (and perhaps he was not very wrong) that an editor needed few standards to reach the popular taste. In fact, the less one thought and dreamed of the past, the better off he was for the future. He did not understand poetry—except that written by his better half—and would have allowed none to go into the pages of the *Arcadian,* had not John Darrow insisted that verse would be an asset, using as an argument that practically every old lady in the country kept a scrapbook wherein she pasted Ella Wheeler Wilcox and other favorites of the day. And he drew attention to the incontrovertible fact that the query department of every literary supplement was crowded with requests to republish famous lines from dead and living versifiers. He had won out on these two points. He did not mean to be subject to H. S.'s theories. The *Arcadian* was selling remarkably well. You couldn't walk down the Avenue the afternoon it was issued without seeing dozens of copies fondly clasped in the hands of romantic young maidens; and the

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passengers in the suburban trains were sure to get it as soon as they could, too. Mortie Langdon's quips and jests were the talk of the town; and Martin Shaftsbury's poems had been mentioned over and over again by the reviewers. The *outré* fiction made its definite appeal. There was a cleverness in every page that could not be denied; and young writers considered that they had "arrived" when Darrow accepted them. His almost uncanny gift for "smelling a writer a mile away," as Agnes Stanhurst phrased it, was what made the *Arcadian* a go; and it was Major Moulton's belief in him—the dollars rolling in were the visible proof of his editorial judgment—that caused him to say he should have a free rein, and work along without restrictions of any sort.

"We'll all be thinkin' things over," the Major said, rising to indicate that the interview was at an end. "I know how my big family thinks always of me and my magazine. You've been a good editor, John; and I'm sure you and H. S. will work somethin' out between you that'll be for the best all around." He patted the young man on the back, and John could not help feeling a glow of pride in the Major's words. He was conscious, too, that H. S. was looking a little enviously at him. To be praised openly by the Major—that was quite an event. But he didn't want H. S. to feel slighted.

"We'll all be thinking hard, as you say, Major. H. S. will probably unfold a fine plan," he was generous enough to say. "Good night, Mrs. Moulton; and good night, Major." He extended his hand. "Going my way?" he turned to H. S. and said.

"No; I'm going up-town," Templeton answered.

He loitered behind, until John had closed the door down-stairs. Then the Major invited him to have a night-cap with him; and H. S. was only too glad of an excuse to remain a little longer. As he swallowed his

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highball, he got in a word about the hot-headedness of youth, and the temptations of a big city, and how well it was to know just what the members of a staff were up to in their private lives. Not a name was mentioned —H. S. was far too clever to be personal; but when he finally went home, he left a trail of innuendo behind him; and the Major and his wife wondered about many things. "Actresses and poets who drink too much are not the best company for impetuous youngsters," H. S. had said. "These cafés play havoc with a man's pocketbook. I seldom go to them myself—roistering places. Home and wife are good enough for me."

And as the Major clasped Mrs. Moulton's hand in the hallway, where they were all saying good night, he agreed with H. S., and thought what a moral man he was, and how splendid it was that he had him in his office, to keep a vigilant eye on everything and everybody.

But the Major had consumed no less than six drinks that evening; and, seen through a haze of alcohol, morality is a most admirable thing—in others.

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CHAPTER V

I

THE meeting came to nothing but this: Old Englehardt was not dismissed, but it was unanimously agreed that H. S. should be authorized to hire a progressive circulation man who would have full charge, under him, of a campaign for increasing subscriptions. A card was to be sent out, in which a silver dollar could be placed; and for this sum six issues of the *Arcadian* would be sent to readers, with an opportunity to renew for a like period at the same rate. It was thereby hoped to pull in enough subscribers to make certain demands upon advertisers. Little was said of the purchase of manuscripts by the editorial department. Templeton, on second thoughts, did not wish to put his neck into a noose, and be forced to admit his eavesdropping, harmless in itself. He saw that John remembered the open door leading to his office. Moreover, nothing would be gained by hurting Shaftsbury. If the day should ever come when the editor made a demand upon the business office for a check in advance, then he would declare open rebellion, and fight the issue out. He was content just now to make haste slowly. He had plans up his sleeve. He had little use for "temperaments"; but after all, a quiet surveillance of the editorial department could be accomplished and no one be the wiser

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for his vigilance. His hope was that one day he would be in complete charge of the entire office. The magazine was young; and if his efforts brought in an enormous list of readers, and put cash in the bank, his prospects would be fifty per cent brighter within another year or so. He was shrewd. He could wait. But meantime he would watch.

He was suave to Darrow. The latter merely listened to plans and ideas, and acquiesced when they seemed for the ultimate welfare of the periodical. He had no quarrel with H. S. Templeton, so long as the latter kept his hands off; yet he could not help noticing a change—ever so slight—in the Major's attitude toward him. He wondered what it could mean. Sensitive and alert always, he was confident that something had been said of which he knew nothing; and that the incident with Shaftsbury was at the bottom of it all.

It amused him to watch H. S. He graced the meeting in a brand-new suit of pepper-and-salt material, and a shirt of appalling pattern. His collars were always too high—"chokers," the girls called them; and his vici-kid shoes, neatly polished for the occasion, tapped the floor as their wearer waited for the Major, and rummaged among some papers on the table to give the appearance of weighty matters pending.

Old Englehardt, fearful that he would be "let out," was all attention, and quick to run back and forth for the business manager. It was "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," continually; and John suffered at the spectacle of an elderly man thus rubbing his hands in the presence of one so much younger; a gray head bowed before the sleek black locks of the master of the office. But he knew that four mouths to feed besides his own might cause any man who was an obvious failure at sixty to do the terrible bidding of the calm manager. The worst of it was that

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the latter seemed to enjoy his power. The pressing of a bell gave him a sharp pleasure. He gloried in summoning people to him, and then keeping them waiting while he pretended to be too preoccupied to notice them.

"Now all we need is the man for the job," he was announcing to the Major and the others present, when the meeting was about to adjourn. "Shall we advertise? I confess that I have no one special in mind; but I want a man who will function, one whose record is clean, and who will be on the job from nine till six—and later, when necessary."

He looked around with conscious pride at his own long hours. He never missed an opportunity to ring in the fact that he was a hummer for work; that office air was the only air he really cared to breathe. He tapped his pencil on the blotter before him, and waited for someone to speak.

"I think we'd better leave this to you, H. S., since the plan is yours. Has anyone any objections?" It was the Major himself who spoke.

No one had. John Darrow was sure anyone chosen by H. S. would be satisfactory to the rest of them. The main thing was to start the campaign as swiftly as possible, and he promised to arrange a list of the principal features of the *Arcadian* for the next six months, so that these could be advertised on the card that was to go out.

"Good!" H. S. said, instantly falling into his ponderous dictation voice. "Make a note, Miss Elliot, that I am empowered to engage the Circulation Manager we need, at a salary commensurate with the position." He basked in such flowery language, and leaned back, staring at the ceiling. He felt that he was gaining every step of the way, creeping up that hill of authority where he longed to be.

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II

It was three days later. A blue morning of magnificence, with no wind scuttling through the streets, but a tang in the air that sent the blood pounding in one's veins; the kind of morning when one was glad to be alive, part of the white glory of the world.

John had walked over to the office with unusual exhilaration, his manuscript-case bulging with its plethora of stories, articles, and verse. He drank in the wonder of the clean day, and thought of the things he could write if he had it all for his own. To him, the morning hours were the best; and if duty had not hailed him to the *Arcadian* desk, he was confident that his table at home would lure him every morning after breakfast to the work he longed to do. But if it was a grind to traverse the same streets each day, and reach a certain little cubby-hole and open a pile of letters, it was a pleasant grind; and he was grateful to be even so small a part of the energy of the city; one atom who did his valiant best in the colossal scheme of things. A day like this got into his brain and heart; and he thought of the snow-clad hills of Stockton, of the long, still roads that must have been banked by the recent fall; of the view from his old bedroom window down the sunlit valley; and a piercing sense of the loveliness of the world came to him. Yet these canyon streets were beautiful, too; these gray walls, the smoke rising above them, the high windows and turrets shining with the light of another day; these narrow agate lanes that led authentically to busy crossroads—he did not weary of their glamour and hard delight. Some day he would write a song of the traffic here, the pounding and turmoil, the stress and fervor of it all; get upon paper the wildness and delirium of New York—yes, and the richness and sweetness of it, as well. The first line of

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such a poem began to come to him, miraculously sang in his brain. If only he had a pencil, he would stop right here and put it down. He fumbled a bit, but, like all editors, he seldom carried with him any of the necessary tools of his profession. And here he was, anyhow, at his office building. People were scurrying around him, thronging the corridors, crowding into the elevators; and before he was aware of it he was being whirled to his floor, amid a hum of conversation. Where was the magic line? Somewhere out in the Square, blown more lightly away than the snowflakes of the evening before—lost, lost forever.

Two or three callers awaited him. Peter was keeping them under control, showing them the now priceless initial copy of the *Arcadian,* long ago out of print, and otherwise making friends for the magazine. He had a pride in his job, as well as in his neckties; and with secret literary leanings of his own he worshipped Darrow, and protected him at every turn. When he heard his footsteps down the hall, he immediately busied himself with the callers, to divert their attention. He wanted the editor to have ten minutes with his mail before he announced Miss This, or Mr. That. Peter was an office-boy with tact, intelligence and imagination.

Along toward noon, H. S. strolled into John's office. He held a dozen letters in his hand, and looked woebegone.

"Absolutely nothing," he began, rather cryptically. "Strange how our adver*tise*ment has brought forth so little response," he illuminatingly added. "I wonder where all the good men are?"

Darrow sympathized with him. "You can't find the right man in a day," he said. "Patience, H. S."

"But it's three days now. I don't like to have it so quiet along the Potomac." John had vowed to kill him

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the next time he uttered that remark. "Have dinner with me this noon?" H. S. asked, ignorant of the dreadful thought in John's head. He had never got over the habit of alluding to the midday meal as "dinner."

"Yes; I think it's all right," the young editor answered, looking at his desk-pad, however, to make certain he had not forgotten an engagement. But H. S. had glanced at the pad before Darrow came in.

"Then come with me over to the Martin, won't you?" He pronounced it as though it were Shaftsbury's first name. "A good day for a quiet chat, don't you think so?"

John liked that long room with the golden curtains—a room that seemed always afire with laughter and joy. Here was a world within a world; a dizzy, delirious pattern unlike any other in existence; a mad, jocund place, the great mirrors reflecting endless vistas of hilarity; a shining, gilded island set in the roaring sea of the city. If a grande-dame rubbed elbows with a harlot, no one noticed—or cared. Wine agents leaned over their blonde companions, and gentlemen brought in their cocottes, unmindful of the consequences. Society liked to escape to this place, and be a part of it for an hour or so, sipping its green and dangerous absinthe, smoking its innumerable cigarettes and watching the smoke curl gracefully to the highly painted ceiling. All classes met here on common ground; and the busy French waiters slid through the aisles of tables, piling up the little saucers on which were marked the prices of the drinks, making no mistakes, polite to everybody in equal measure.

Today the winter sun poured through the tall windows, giving a mellow light to the scene. John thought the place was like an amber bowl. There was a strange effect of illusion and artificiality here, always. It was a beautiful hell.

They got a seat, fortunately, in the corner, where they

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could look on, and yet be a definite part of the spectacle. It was not long before the room filled up comfortably. The tables against the wall, with leather seats, were of course most in demand; and when this outer crust was formed, the centre filled in until there was a compact mass. The gowns of the women formed notes of lovely color; their hats were uneven hedgerows of beauty; and as John looked down the glowing room, he wondered at all this flowery pretension. Why did people spend so much on that which was worth so little? Many of the men had sodden faces, eyes that betrayed long nights of revel; and the eager eyes of the women told of quests that never ended, dreams that never came true.

H. S., though he saw the pageant, in his way, and liked it, felt a little abashed here. He was ill at ease when he picked up a menu printed in French; and though the dinner was to be on him, as he put it, he had the wit to ask his guest to do the ordering. John had learned swiftly in his few years in the great city; and he had that easily acquired American sophistication which always stood him in good stead in any emergency. But he was humanly snobbish enough to hope that the waiter would not hear Templeton speak of "dinner."

They did not drink, since they were going back to the office; but the filet of sole, the salad, sweet and cheese, followed by specially made coffee, were delicious; and H. S., frankly ignorant of even the simplest words on the card, leaned back to enjoy his surroundings, once the necessary order had been given. He envied John his facility with the waiter, though like most people of his type, he did not consider himself in any way less attractive than this progressive young man of the world. There were no known complexes then; but the psycho-analysts of today would read a man like Templeton easily, and be aware of his own constant sense of inferiority.

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"Great place," H. S. was saying. "Lots of money represented in this room." He judged success always in terms of dollars.

"Yes; it's one of New York's gayest spots," John remarked. "I like it in the evening, too. Everybody seems to come here then."

"There's only one danger about a restaurant like this," H. S. went on. "You can get too fond of it."

"Of course, the moment pleasures are taken too seriously, they cease to be pleasures," John told him. "I like to look on at a scene like this, and then go back to bread and milk for a few days. Balance—that's the great thing, isn't it, H. S.?"

The other agreed with him, and then got back to his favorite subject—the magazine, and the workings of the office.

"The Major will be going to Florida soon, and I'd like to hire the subscription man before he gets off, and have everything in good running order. Ship-shape and O. K. is my motto." John knew it only too well; certainly H. S. pounded it in hard enough from day to day. "There must be complete co-ordination of all departments. A house divided will fall, you know." He uttered this homely truth as though it were original with him. Yet he could not complain, since he himself, in talking to Templeton, invariably used simple phrases, and was often even painstakingly childlike. How did he know that H. S. was not using similar methods? Wasn't it egotistical for him to think his mind shone with a greater lustre than his companion's? After all, what he did was no more worthy than what H. S. did. One department of the magazine could not exist without the other; and it was folly to believe otherwise. He knew he had one great advantage; for he bought material, while the other sold it—always a less enviable task. He could mingle

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with those who were intellectually engaging; he did not have to waste one moment with people who did not interest him. This made his days one long chain of delight. His associations were exhilarating. The bores that H. S. had to see played no part in his scheme of things. People pursued him; he did not have to pursue others.

"Of all things!" he heard a voice saying. They had reached their coffee, and were smoking their cigarettes. A young man of about his own age was crossing the room—a fellow dressed in the best of taste, and with a smile not only on his lips but in his eyes. The light was full upon him as he moved rapidly to John's table; and at first the latter could not believe his senses. There was a resemblance, yes; but surely no Brooklyn tailor made that dark gray suit; and only a Fifth Avenue haberdasher sold such ties. When had the chrysalis broken, permitting this handsome male butterfly to emerge?

"Nick!" he heard himself saying. "I'm mighty glad to see you." And he rose and shook hands with his old friend. They looked into each other's faces, and there was not a little emotion in this unexpected meeting.

"You've hardly changed at all," Nick Deeley said. "And gosh! how you've gone up in the world, John. Not spoiled, are you?"

"Don't be a jack-ass, Nick. What's there to be spoiled about? It's I who ought to be saying those things." And he took in his friend's apparel.

"This is Mr. Templeton, Mr. Deeley," he finally said; and H. S., who had been interested in this reunion, rose ponderously to shake hands. John could see at once that he was greatly impressed with Nick. The old charm that had meant so much to John Darrow was still there. It could not be denied than an aura surrounded Nick. His fascination was unlimited. He acted as though he were used to life in places like the Martin.

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"I'm only with a man," he said, pushing his way behind the table, and sitting snugly down beside John on the settee. "Don't mind if I chat a moment, do you?" He put one hand affectionately on his knee.

He took out a gold case, and offered expensive cigarettes to Templeton and John. "Have a liqueur?" he invited, as a matter of course. "Never think it's a good plan, myself, to drink in the daytime; but maybe you feel differently."

They smiled, and said they quite agreed with him.

"Funny how we've never run across each other all these years," Nick went on. He looked admiringly at John. "I've read a lot about you in the papers, you old scallawag! Famous now, aren't you? How does it feel?"

"What are you doing, Nick? You look as prosperous as a millionaire. You'll probably be one before long."

"Oh, I'm with a Wall Street journal; but I'm thinking of making a change."

Templeton was listening intently. He liked this handsome young chap, with his easy, bland ways, and his fashionable clothes. When he caught the fact that he was now with a paper, he was all attention.

"What end of the business are you interested in, Mr. Deeley?" he inquired. He knew he couldn't be an editor. No editor dressed like that.

"Circulation and publicity," Nick promptly replied.

"And you're thinking of making a change?" H. S. repeated.

John looked over at him, and wondered what he was driving at. Surely on such short acquaintance, he wasn't going to "make him a proposition"! But he had learned that staid, hard business men are the most emotional people in the world—though they themselves do not know it, and wouldn't admit it if they did.

"Yes," Nick said. "I've been there two years, and

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I've done all I can for them. Now I want to soar higher."

"This was music in the ears of the Business Manager of the *Arcadian*. He liked a man who talked that way. Progressive, alert, ambitious. Great assets, these.

"Smoke one of my cigars, Mr. Deeley," he said, drawing a long Havana from his pocket. "You'll find them good."

John knew that this was much for H. S. to do. It was a sure step toward friendship.

"Thanks. Guess my friend won't be lonesome over there," and he nodded to the other side of the room, where he had left his business companion.

H. S. took things into his own hands. To think that John Darrow had a friend like Deeley, and had never even mentioned him! Here was splendid timber, potential stuff, a personality which "got over" at once—just the kind of material he was on the lookout for. And of course, being a friend of Darrow's, he was bound to be all right. It was the most fortuitous encounter, and it seemed to him like a dispensation of Providence that the young fellow was in the very line of business he hoped he would be in. That he was contemplating a change made the circle of luck complete. It was fate.

Nick was anxious to talk over old times with John; and the latter was not averse to turning the conversation backward; but every time they mentioned Brooklyn, H. S. felt that a few valuable moments were being wasted, and instantly switched the talk to the present. He had never in his life fallen so hard for a fellow. The suavity, the grace, the distinction of Deeley completely captivated him. He liked his swiftness of mind, the way he could leap from one topic to another, and never lose the thread of what he was saying; his evident love of life and people and the great game of the business world. Nick was

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no one's fool. The moment he became conscious that Templeton was interested in him, he started to play a little game. The manager had thrown out a hint—oh, just the shadow of a hint—that the *Arcadian* might hold an opening for the right person—a big job, that would get bigger every month.

"I guess I'd better get back to my friend," Nick said at the psychological moment. "He brought me up here to talk over a deal he's anxious to have me go in on with him. So I'll trot along." He rose, and turned to shake hands with John. "When can we meet again, old sport?" he wanted to know. Affection was in his eyes. He had never ceased caring for Darrow, even after their unpleasantness. "I want to tell you all about the family, and my plans, and lots of things," he went on. "Why don't you dine with me at the City Club tomorrow night, John?"

There was no reason to refuse. Of course he would, with pleasure; and it would be great to talk over, in detail, those old happy and unhappy days. There were worse fellows than Nick Deeley; and Jove! how he had changed for the better!

"Don't be in a hurry, Mr. Deeley," John heard H. S. saying, as Nick turned to shake hands with him. "I've got something I'd like to talk over with you. Can't you run into my office as soon as you've finished your din—luncheon?"

John tried to catch the eye of H. S. Templeton; but the latter evidently had no thought of anything or anybody except Nicholas Deeley.

"Delighted," Nick said, as though nothing in the whole world had ever interested him more. "We won't say good-bye, then. See you in a little while, Mr. Templeton."

And he was gone. His metamorphosis was a symbol

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of what New York can do to Brooklyn. Even his back was indicative of a certain assurance and strength acquired only after contact with Wall Street, Broadway and Fifth Avenue. The way his head was placed on his shoulders; the manner in which he shook hands; the new inflection of his voice; the trim of his waving hair; the slant of his eye—these things were something for John to ponder over, as his old friend moved across the room. When he found his table, Nick waved to Darrow; and he could see that he was telling his companion who they were, and noted the vivid interest expressed.

"Great young man, that," H. S. remarked. "Now, there's the kind of chap we need; and I'd like you to tell me something about him, if you don't mind, Darrow. How long have you known him?"

Here was one of those situations in life that many of us face. If John should tell the absolute truth about Nick Deeley he would ruin his chances to land a fine position. On the contrary, if he concealed the weaknesses of his character, might he not be doing Templeton an injustice? To give an unqualified reference of approval is always the simplest way out of such a difficulty. No matter what a servant has done, there are few employers who will not write out a clean bill of judgment, and pass it on with a sense of having done a noble and generous thing. After all, with certain intimate relations severed, it does not devolve upon one to reveal the entire record of those relations. Enough that the one dismissed has a square deal and a chance to go on to something higher and better. Who was Darrow, the thought came to him, to judge the old Nick Deeley? Five years had passed; and these five years had evidently done much for the boy with whom he had ridden a bicycle, with whom he had quarreled, and for whose family's sake he had stayed on in South Portland Avenue, until the father had finally died.

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No doubt Nick was now living in New York, and no doubt he was one of those resourceful young Americans who would push himself forward, find the exalted heights in business, and use every vestige of that charming personality, as an actor uses every bit of histrionic ability at his command, to "sell" himself to the audience. He liked him still—he couldn't help it. Yet he could see that some of Nick's simplicity, which had been the most engaging thing about him, was lost now in the modish man about town; and he was not sure that he did not prefer a semi-rustic barbarity to a studied conformity to an artificial social order. Well, we all had to choose our method of expression; and if it pleased Nick to put on up-to-the-minute clothes, he would not find fault with his over-dapper appearance. That was his armor, perhaps, to conquer a stupid world and forcibly convince it of his cleverness; and it was no more to be despised than Shaftsbury's windsor ties—not so much, a great many people would have said. John had long since refused to criticise long hair, as opposed to short hair. If one was more becoming than the other, that was its *raison d'être*. A case could be made out for almost any eccentricity; and after the obvious posturings of so many artists and writers whom he knew, Nick came as a normal contrast; and he found himself glowing with the old affection, falling under the curious spell of the boy. He considered how kind he had been to him after the tragedy of Mary. The year following her death had been almost intolerable; yet Nick had clung to him, behaved nobly; and if John gave to the Deeleys, they, too, gave much to him of crude but sincere sympathy.

No; though he did not altogether relish the thought of a close relationship now on the magazine with Nick, he would not stand in his way. If Deeley could bring something to the *Arcadian,* could sweep the agate H. S.

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off his feet, and in one brief meeting charm them both, he had assets from on high; and John Darrow, instead of hurting him, would strive to help him.

Thus it was that Nick came back into his life. Once more the tides of the great city had drawn their crafts together, and they would float side by side on the pounding sea.

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CHAPTER VI

I

THEY had a remote table at Mouquin's.

March had just gone out like a lamb; and the first April glamour was drenching the city with its silver light.

Constance Muir was still playing at the Empire—it had been a wonderful season for her; and these quiet luncheons with John Darrow were bright spots that she seemed to look forward to. She told him she liked them better than their hurried dinners. And when he considered how many times she must be sought, he counted himself rich in her presence. He was unconscious of everyone in the room save her, as they sought out their quiet place. But heads turned to appraise his companion's youthful beauty, and the whisper went through the whole place that the leading lady at the Empire was over there in the corner, and how marvelous she looked, and who was the young man with her, and wasn't he in luck? To all of which they were both oblivious, of course.

"Oh, you lazy-bones!" she was saying. "Nothing to show me yet—no, not one word, one line, since that night we first talked the play over. What on earth have you been doing?"

That was the way she had talked to him every time they had met. And although he explained how the maga-

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zine took all his energy, all his time, she could not seem to understand.

"But the play is the most important thing in your life," she reiterated. He had heard her say that twenty times.

"I know—I know, indeed, my dear. But what am I to do? I'm simply a victim. I have to find writers for the magazine—and they come in like golden nuggets in the morning mail. I found a wonderful story only yesterday—and you'll never know the exhilaration of that! Why, it was as if I had struck oil, found a gold mine, had a new planet swim into my ken!" She watched his face light up; and she wondered how it was possible for anyone to care so deeply about the work of others. She liked to utter the lines of her part as well as she could; but then, as she did so, she was projecting her own personality over the footlights, making herself known to that vast audience out in front. His enthusiasm found its expression behind closed doors, with no one to look on. Crazy people, these editors. They seemed to get so little credit—a vicarious thrill once in a while, and that was about all there was to it.

"But when the magazine comes out, with your 'find' in it, and you begin to hear people say what a great story Smith's is," he was explaining to her, after she had told him something of what she felt, "you get a reaction of pleasure which it is hard to describe. You feel that if it hadn't been for you, for your discernment, poor Smith might still be lying in your manuscript basket."

"But why not be in Smith's position, which seems far more important to me?" she laughed. "If you'll only do the play, John, people will be talking about Darrow instead of this man Smith; and while I'm working evenings, you can be lying back daytimes, simply pulling in the royalties. Can you think of anything more delightful?"

He couldn't. He had to admit that; but it was not

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only the magazine, and copy for the advertising campaign they had been busy launching, which took up so much of his time. He had had bad news from home—his mother was ill, and he had had to run up to Stockton and see to things. After all, he was the only man in the family; and someone had to take the helm in a crisis. Things always devolved upon him.

"It's just because you let things devolve upon you. Be a little more selfish of your time, John. You're everlastingly giving those little box parties at Weber and Fields, and chafing-dish suppers in your rooms after the show—oh, I've been to a few of the suppers—not all of them, though, I'll wager!"

"You've been to every one of them, Connie, and you know it. I could no more have a party without you, than without booze!"

"Oh, thanks for the compliment!"

"I only mean you're as necessary to liven things up. Think of all you've come to mean to me, dear. Were you serious in what you said the other day?"

"Of course I was—if you'll work for yourself, and not so much for that old magazine that seems to be the thing you love most of all. If we're ever divorced, I'll name the *Arcadian* as co-respondent! I never saw such devotion!"

"Well, I just can't help it," he said. "I'd rather be at that stuffy little office of mine——"

"—than out in this big room with me, I suppose you're going to say?"

"Hardly that, dear. But, honestly, why do I love it so? It's the breath of my nostrils. I go in evenings, often, just to poke around and see if the six-o'clock mail by any chance brought the story I'm looking for, always. And once in a while I'm there by eight, so that I can rubber through the letters and imagine what may be in

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them. Oh, those fat envelopes, with all the hopes and tears and laughter of Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo in them! And those voices from the prairies and California —those thousands of people, all wanting to be heard, all craving fame! What becomes of them, I wonder? Only a few get in; only about one per cent ever achieve anything worth while. Where do the others drift?"

"It's the same in my work. Think of the Rialto, John —that stream of tragic faces, forever moving, moving up and down, trying to land at some wharf! They steer in at the stage doors, and are told there's nothing. My heart aches for them, as they drift away. But what can one do?"

"That's the worst of it. The hopelessness of so many of them! Yet I do think everyone should be able to get a hearing. Here we sit, happy and young and very much in love, and those battles are raging all around us, now —at this very moment! Do you ever think of that, Connie dear?"

"I do, indeed I do! But we've earned our happiness, haven't we? Say we have, so that I won't feel miserable for a week!"

"I don't know. There's a lot of luck in it all. It's such a confounded mystery to me—what it's all about; where we're going, and why we ever came. I suppose the normal thing to do is just to try one's best to get through the present incarnation as well as one can, and 'leave to God the rest,' as I read in a poem once."

"I think that's about all anyone can hope to do," she told him. They had become very serious; and the dandelion salad, with its dainty egg dressing, lay neglected on the table; and their Chablis was forgotten. Their waiter, seeing their concentration, had blessedly disappeared. For themselves, they might have been on an island, miles away from anywhere. There was a distant hum in their

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ears, as of a far surf crying on some forlorn shore; but they were scarcely conscious of the sound. People—they had so much of them, always. And John had that satisfying power of being alone in any crowd, and making his companion feel likewise. It was a gift which saved him, had he but known it, from a nervous breakdown. It is the hardest thing in the world to interview people all day long; to have them drift vaguely before one, and listen interestedly to their tales. It took a lot out of him. No wonder, at night, he wished only quiet and peace, or the light company of someone like Nick Deeley when, because of her play, he could not see Constance. No wonder he found little time or inclination for producing a manuscript of his own.

"But the months are flying by," Connie had warned him repeatedly. "If you don't start this winter, you'll not start until next—and maybe not then."

"I know it." was his inevitable reply. Yet what was he to do?

They were speaking of it again today, and now so seriously that even the office was forgotten by him; and they did not notice H. S. Templeton leaving his table at the other end of the room, or see his tall form as he vanished down the little stairs.

"Yet you say you love me," Connie told him. "And you want *me* to go on to greater things; and here you fritter your life away, and won't even begin your comedy for me?"

"Fritter my life away?" he repeated her phrase. "Do you really call it that?"

"Yes, in a sense. You don't like the unpleasant truth, John, do you?"

"Who does? Only, I don't think that's the truth."

"But here I am, waiting for your play, pretty sure of getting it put on, and you *won't* write it. Are you too

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lazy, or too stupid, or what?" She didn't smile as she said it, and he had the sense that perhaps she was trying to shock him into activity; or perhaps she wished to pick a quarrel with him to bring him around.

"You have no faith in me, Connie."

"I have; but you have no faith in yourself—only a profound belief in the energy of others." He saw that she was thoroughly in earnest, and he was frightened.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

"I would love you more if you did more," she replied.

"Will you marry me, if I promise to work hard—put everything I've got of talent and feeling into that play for you?"

"Yes; some day," was her immediate response. But he felt just a little hesitation between the words, as though she had planned to say them, like the lines of a part; or was that merely his imagination in the excitement of the moment? He could not tell. He wondered if he loved enough, if she loved enough. Somewhere, far away, a voice seemed to speak to him at that instant. "To thine own self be true," it was saying, ever so faintly.

He looked up. Constance was before him. It was real then—this big room, with its light and warmth and cheer. The past was gone, dead; nothing from it could be brought back—no, least of all could he ever bring back one vanished face. Why weep over what had been, over what was never meant to be? One had to go on. It was not the part of Youth to droop and languish. If, out of the dim distance, he should hear those words—ah! that was another matter; that was the iron of his dream which could endure. For the rest, he must let it go. She did not belong to him any more; she was part of some mysterious plan beyond the stars. We live for the living, he remembered, and not for the dead.

But could he justify himself with the young girl before

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him now? She insisted that he prove his worth. Accomplishment was her watchword. Without that, she did not want him, would not take him. Did she love him, then? This thought flashed through his mind.

"If I never wrote that play," he was saying. "What then, Connie?"

She looked him straight in the eyes. "You should be ashamed to speak of never writing it, after the promises you have given me."

This made it hard for him to go on. Yet he persisted:

"I wonder if you love me for myself—or for the play—perhaps for the sport of the thing!"

"John!" That was all she said.

"Forgive me," he begged. "I'm highstrung and nervous today, I guess. But I do want your love first of all. What follows will take care of itself."

"But it won't!" she insisted. "Don't you see that we must have something to build on, something to count upon?"

"My love is enough," he countered.

She did not reply. What was the use? He was, after all, an impractical poet. She had known a great deal about temperament and moods. She would have liked, in that moment, to have shaken him. Instead, she started to draw on her gloves—those gloves that crinkled at the wrist.

"Come, we've had enough of arguing, John dear. Let's go. I have some shopping to do."

He could see that she was determined to leave the table. He, too, had pressing things to be done; he should not loiter here.

"Very well," he said. "Louis, the check."

He put her in a hansom, and walked back to Madison Square. It was almost three o'clock, and H. S. was pacing the floor.

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He told him that they needed a sketch to go with some new advertising matter they were planning, and the Art Editor was away ill; couldn't Darrow suggest an illustrator to do it?—a rush job which should be finished in a day or two.

II

He had not rung up Elsie Triggert to tell her he was coming to see her about a drawing, for the very good reason that she had no telephone in her apartment. Times had been hard for her, and she had had it removed a month ago. It was when he discovered this tragic fact that he determined to give her the job for the magazine; and there was no one he could delegate to call upon her, with Mason at home ill. So, that very afternoon, an hour later, he took the Elevated and reached her flat in West One hundred and ninth street.

It was a commonplace row of stone buildings, where every stoop was exactly like the others all down the block—a monotonous, ghastly street that somehow made him think of tired and plain old maids waiting patiently for rumors of romance.

Some children were playing noisily in the middle of the street, their piercing voices rising above the clamor of two or three vendors and scissors-grinders. One man's cart was laden with Spring flower-pots, and these were the only note of color in the dingy neighborhood. He decided at once that he would take one of these to Elsie, to brighten up that front room he had learned to know so well. She probably hadn't had any flowers since his last visit, over three months ago.

There was no elevator. Elsie could hardly afford an apartment with that luxury. The stairs were poorly

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carpeted, and one knew that the sunlight never penetrated this dark hallway. There was a stale odor of thousands of meals that had been cooked, and under the first crook of the stairs a baby-carriage protruded with a mussed-up pillow and tiny quilt. An abandoned milk-bottle hung by its rubber tube from the hood, and just as he passed, a door opened behind him and a frowsy girl of fifteen or so emerged and hurriedly removed it, together with the pillow and quilt. She jerked them up as though she despised the job.

As he climbed the stairs, now and then a door was partially opened, then closed hurriedly. In the caverns behind them he knew that people mysteriously existed. Women in wrappers (who would have delighted the soul of H. S. Templeton!) played solitaire with the gas lighted, and waited for their husbands to come home, drunk or sober; or leaned on the window-sills through the long afternoon when the warm weather came, and got acquainted with their neighbors, gossiping of nothing at all.

It was here that Elsie Triggert passed her days; and he could not help comparing this shabbiness and shoddiness with his own comfortable chambers as he pushed the little button on her door-frame.

He heard her pattering down the hall; and when the door opened she could scarcely believe it was he, and gave a little gasp of surprise.

"Why, John Darrow, of all people!" she cried out. "Do come in; but I'm all upset, and you'll have to forgive a messy place." She put her hands, very femininely, to her hair, trying hurriedly to arrange it, though it was not in a very disordered state. John noticed that she was pale.

As he followed her to the front of the flat, which she had fitted up both as a work-room and a general living-

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room, his eye caught a glimpse of dishes on the corner of a table; and he was conscious of an open box of sardines, a few casual gingersnaps and a cup of tea.

He put the flower-pot beside the food, and suddenly it became a lamp, lighting up the room.

"Oh, you big, bad John Darrow!" exclaimed poor little Elsie; and the tears almost came to her weary eyes. "Always thinking of someone else! And you know I love daffodils!"

He took off his coat, and put it beside his hat on the couch. He knew Elsie so well that he didn't have to ask her permission. But today she seemed a bit nervous. She glanced at him as though she wondered how long he was going to remain; and he could not have said why he guessed it, but he at once felt that someone besides themselves was in the flat.

"Don't mind this food," Elsie was apologizing; and hurriedly she began to remove the remnants of what had evidently been her luncheon.

John went over and took her by both shoulders.

"Look here, Elsie," he said, very slowly and distinctly, "what does this mean—your eating like this on the corner of your work-table, at four in the afternoon, your drawing all scattered about? Why are you so distrait? Tell me. Out with it!" He shook her a little, and tried to laugh.

She tried to smile, too; but it was only the ghost of a smile.

"There's no use lying to you, John. I was only able to get my lunch a few moments before you came."

"And is that what you call luncheon?" He pointed to the frugal fare. "It isn't fit for your cat, Elsie. It's no way to live. You can't get along on stuff like that."

"Oh, I know it, John." There was a tremor in her voice. "But it's all right. There doesn't seem to be

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much demand for my kind of work just now; but I'll pull out somehow."

"That's what I rushed up here today for," he said. "I want you to do a quick job for us—only an advertising stunt; but there's something in it for you right away."

"You didn't make this up since you came in?" Again she tried to smile as she said it. "It would be just like you."

"Of course not! I didn't telephone, because you haven't any 'phone now—you poor little helpless lunatic! A telephone's as necessary in your business as it is in mine! Don't economize on *that!* Give up anything else!"

"Easy enough to say; but the Company shut it off, when I was four months behind. Can't blame them, can you? And surely you can't blame *me!*"

"Why didn't you come to me?"

"Everybody goes to you. That's why I stayed away."

"But what are friends for? You know it would be a privilege for me to—" He didn't like to say it bluntly; the mention of money always hurt his sensibilities.

"Oh, I know, I know, John Darrow! But I just couldn't go to you."

He searched her face. She was even paler than when he came in. She had been going through some difficult crisis, and, living alone as she did, she had no one to lean upon. This was the great city's monstrous way—to crush and bruise those who had come valiantly to rest upon her iron heart, and then cast them aside when she wearied of their clamor and cries. He had been only a few miles down-town; but he might as well have been on the Pacific Coast—or around the corner, he thought cynically—so little do people in New York know of their neighbors and their little sorrows.

"And why *couldn't* you have come to me?" he asked

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her, sharply. "Didn't you ever think, Elsie, that it would give me pleasure—yes, genuine pleasure—to help a friend like you? And you've deprived me of a little orgy of good deeds!"

"That's a curious way of looking at it; I confess no such idea had ever come into my head." She put her hand up to her forehead, as though she were in a mental turmoil. "Sit down, John. Take that easy-chair." She motioned him to it, near the window.

"Where are you going to sit?" he wanted to know.

She finally took a seat; but he noticed that she glanced toward the folding-doors that separated this room from another. He pretended not to see.

"Let's get the business over first, Elsie," he suggested; and he explained as rapidly as possible just what it was they wanted her to do.

"That's fine, John, and I'll do it if I can; but maybe I won't be able to have it ready by Friday—I'm so tired."

"You look it. Elsie Triggert, I don't believe you've had enough to eat today!"

"If it had only been today!" she cried, and laughed hysterically.

"By God! this is terrible!" Darrow exclaimed. He seized his hat—he didn't wait a moment—and was down the stairs and down the street in a second. Over on Columbus avenue he rushed into the first delicatessen shop he came to, and almost terrified the proprietor by ordering everything good in sight—a whole chicken, potato salad, bread, butter, crackers, jelly, assorted cold meats—he hardly knew what he purchased. He thought the man would never wrap them up; yet it was only ten minutes before he was back again, knocking impetuously at Elsie's door.

Her eyes filled with tears when she saw his arm so full of packages.

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"Was there ever anyone in the world like you, John?" was all she could say.

"Bosh!" was his reply, as he spread most of the food out, and ordered her to eat.

"And now," John said, after he had watched her consume some of the chicken, "tell me who's in that next room."

Elsie Triggert stared hard at him as though he had gone quite mad.

"Why, what do you mean? What room?" she tried to evade him.

"Don't make me ask again, Elsie. I have my suspicions; but I want you to tell me."

She did not answer; but her eyes would not meet his. She bent over her food, buttered another slice of bread, tasted it and almost choked over it. But already more color was coming into her cheeks; and he had no fears for her now.

"Answer me, Elsie. I know it's all right, but I simply want to know about it from you."

"Well," she fumbled, "it's Mortie Langdon, of course."

"Drunk again?" she heard him question.

"Yes."

"How long has he been here?"

"Since early morning."

"And that's why you haven't had much to eat yourself—given most of everything you had to him?"

"Oh, he didn't eat much. He was too ill."

"Oh, you wonderful little Elsie!" John cried. "How can you make such a fool of yourself, deny yourself for that worthless playboy!"

"He needed me. He got into trouble, and came and told me all about it—he always does, you know. I feel so sorry for him. He's a good boy—when he doesn't drink, John."

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"Yes; but he's drunk most of the time now; and he has no right to impose on your goodness. Lord! what rotters there are in this town! Hasn't he any decency left? He could have come to me, and I'd have helped him out, and given him a couch to sleep on. You're the only woman in the world who could get away with a situation like this, Elsie. Just think of that fool working you in such a way! It's horrible. Why do you take care of him when he's on these sprees?"

"It's my suppressed mother instinct, I guess. John, you know that, don't you?"

"Of course I know it, Elsie. One has only to look at you to know you're as good as the day you were born."

"Imagine Mortie caring for me in any but a childlike way! Why, I'm forty-six, John, and he's only twenty-five!"

He smiled at her simplicity.

"Bless your heart, Elsie, you're an old dear, and we all love you. But don't let them impose on you too much."

"As if you weren't imposed on, John!" She smiled—it was a real smile now.

"Oh, but I'm always aware of it when people are using me." He took out a cigarette and asked if he might smoke. She nodded.

"Always?" she asked, watching him strike the match.

"Of course. I'm no fool."

"You're an even bigger fool than I am," was her amazing statement. "You come up here and accuse me of being a simpleton, and you yourself are the biggest one I know, John!"

He put his cigarette down on the edge of the table, and leaned across, facing her.

"Say, have you gone quite mad, Elsie? Has the banquet gone to your head?"

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"No; I'm as sane as you are, John. I didn't mean to say a word to you; but for God's sake why don't you wake up to certain things? I can't see a friend like you being made a fool of—particularly after today, after what you've done for me."

He could not speak. He could only stare at her.

"Elsie, this is nonsense," at last he managed to get out.

"It isn't nonsense—it's sense—plain, common sense. Everyone knows everything—except you yourself."

He got up, and went over and took her hands in his.

"Elsie, tell me what you mean. Let's not beat about the bush. You know how direct I always am. God knows I was direct enough with you this afternoon; now you be direct with me."

"I will—I will indeed," she said. "I can't hold in any longer, John. You're too good and true a friend. I hate to see the wool pulled over your eyes." She paused, as though putting on her armor before battle. Then, "Are you engaged to Constance Muir?"

"I—I think I am," he said. His face became ghastly. He had not known what she would say. But what did she mean?

"Are you writing a play for her?"

"I am supposed to be," he tried to smile.

She was silent; she seemed unable to go on.

"Well?" John questioned.

"Oh," she fumbled, "I don't know how to say it, John—you're so decent, and kind, and—yes, gentle and unspoiled by this big city; and those others are so cruel and cold!"

"Those others?" he said. "Whom do you mean?"

"Why, her—Constance Muir, and—and Shaftsbury!"

"Good God!" he cried out. "You're not going to tell me—you're not going to say that—" He could not finish. The room seemed to rock; the world seemed

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tumbling about his shoulders, his head; the floor was coming up and smashing him in the face. What was that noise in the other room—just behind those doors? Surely he heard a groan, and a sound as though someone were beating on the wall. Before he knew it, the folding doors rolled apart, and the dishevelled figure of Mortie Langdon stood before him, fully dressed, save that his coat was off, and his collar and tie. Handsome, dissipated Mortie, his hair tousled, his eyes strangely alive. He needed a shave, he needed fresh linen; but like many who drink a great deal, he seemed to have become perfectly sober in the twinkling of an eye. It was evident that he had been sleeping off a long debauch.

"She's right!" were his first words. "If Elsie won't tell you, I will, John!"

He came all the way into the room, and Elsie got out of her chair, and grasped John's arm, frightened.

"Why, Mortie!" she cried, "I thought you were still asleep!"

"So I was!" he answered. "So I was, Elsie, you little brick; but I woke up a few moments ago, and I couldn't help hearing what you two were saying. Good Lord, have I been here all day? What a damned good-for-nothing I am! Letting a woman take care of me when I ought to be out in the gutter!" He stared at them both, and then hung his head in shame.

They were speechless. It was curious, but for all his hard drinking, Mortie had the face of a saint. He was too young for lines and shadows beneath his eyes, and his skin was as clear as though he lived the life of a nun. But the lower part of his face betrayed his weakness. Utterly dependent upon women—any kind of woman would do when he was drunk—he quarreled when he was in his cups; and when the girl down-town whom he hoped one day to marry, dismissed him for

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his high language, he invariably fled to poor Elsie Triggert, and wept on her shoulder. He couldn't bear to be alone, and in the strange delirium of drink he knew that she never kept any whiskey in her house; and the reactionary desire to be an ascetic for a few days—until he regained enough of his strength to repeat his escapade—drove him to her hospitable door.

"Yes, you *should* be ashamed," John said at last to him. "At it again, I see. But never mind." He went over and put one hand on his shoulder. "Buck up, and then take Elsie out to dinner some night to make up for this."

"Oh, I'll do that all right," Mortie said. Then he raised his eyes, not in the least bloodshot. "God! what a decent fellow you are, John Darrow. You seem to understand everybody—except those two alleged friends who are fooling you."

Elsie had been praying that the subject would not come up again; yet it was inevitable. Moreover, John would not have left the flat until he had heard what they had to say.

"Tell me," he now said. Outwardly, he was strangely calm. The brief interval of silence had helped him to pull himself together.

"Why, since you don't know a thing, I hardly know where to begin. But Beulah has been having a hell of a time," Mortie said. "It seems Martin is running after Constance Muir; and Beulah suspects the worst."

"What lie is this?" Darrow cried. Bells were ringing in his ears. Mortie and Elsie looked all out of drawing—like strange grotesque figures against the wallpaper. He couldn't really be in this room with them, hearing Mortie saying these things. It was all a horrible dream; and he would wake up at home, and laugh at this monstrous scene which Sleep had conjured up.

"It isn't a lie, John. I wish it were. You've become

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a sort of laughing-stock in certain places. You take her to lunch and dinner—but it's Shaftsbury who takes her to supper. And he's writing a play for her—a comedy. Good Lord! it ought to be a tragedy!" Mortie got it all out in one hurried sentence, and Elsie, frightened at the effect of the revelation, shrunk back in a corner of the room.

"Oh, don't tell me this!" Darrow cried, weak and white—far whiter than poor Elsie had been only a half hour ago. "I don't see how I'm going to stand it, if it's true. But it can't be true—she'd never turn out that kind of girl." He fell into the easy-chair, and buried his face in his arms; and for a moment they let him sit there, saying nothing. It was better so—he could have it all out with himself.

If this was what it all meant—his dreams to crumble thus—life was hardly worth living; and as he shook with passion and pain, these two friends could but look on and wonder how he had been so deluded. No one had dared go to him; and unless he had accidently come here today, months might have drifted on, and the true state of things remained still unknown to him.

He got up at last. "I'll go now," he said. "Forgive me for seeming to break down, for being a fool; but it was just a little too much for me."

He took his things from the couch.

"Thanks, Elsie; thanks, Mortie," he said. "Don't speak of this to anyone—will you promise me?" He put out his hand, and they both grasped it at once.

"You can count on us," they told him.

And he was gone.

III

He could not bring himself to see Constance that night. He would have to have solemn hours with himself, before

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he could decide what would be best to do. That she could have failed him he could not believe; but that she could be guilty (with Martin Shaftsbury) of the thing Mortie had indicated, would require the most iron proof. Moreover, did he wish to know whether it was true or not? His hatred all rushed toward the poet; and he saw clearly now how false he was, not only to his wife, but to his friends. A man like that was like a pond-lily—leave it on the pool, enjoy its wonder, but never touch the slimy stem that rooted it to ugly beginnings.

Strangely enough—or naturally enough, with his temperament—he still had the highest regard for Shaftsbury's art; and no acute emotional feeling about the man's abhorrent personality could alter his love of his work. The meanness of the man had nothing to do with his shining gifts as a writer; and though he (John) might be wounded by his actions, he could only be uplifted by his genius. It was this ability to sift and separate the two natures of people like Martin Shaftsbury which had made John a success as an editor. He could pursue the artist and forget and forgive the human shortcomings of the man, always. And this in itself was a talent.

There was no one he could turn to in this crisis. Nor did he wish to open his heart to any friend, however intimate. It was better to battle alone; and if his name had become a jest, he did not wish to take into his confidence anyone who would tell him, possibly, further unpleasant truths.

The next day, however, he determined that he must see Shaftsbury. He could endure suspense no longer; and he was sure that one glimpse of the man would reveal whether or not he was still his friend. He had not seen him in many days, nor had they met, as they so often did, at any of their usual haunts. His mind

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went back to that evening when Connie had the orchids. Had Martin begun then? The irony of life——

He went to his place in East Seventeenth street at noon. He was almost sure of finding him at that hour; for he knew that Shaftsbury seldom went out in the morning. Not that he worked then, but he frequently slept late, and often combined breakfast and luncheon, a meal prepared by Beulah on a little gas stove in their kitchenette.

It was a sort of loft building in which a few apartments had been installed; a bleak, forlorn place that might give one the creeps at night. One imagined that all the mice in New York made their homes here; yet it was strange that they depended upon a poet's abode for their sustenance. The crumbs might be too few from his irregular table; for it was Shaftsbury himself who had said, years before, that poets are born, not paid.

In answer to John's knock, a gruff voice called, "Come in!" And when the young editor opened the door, he saw, in the corner of the huge room, over by the window, the poet's great form stretched upon a couch, wrapped in a velvet dressing-gown that looked as if it had been slept in. His leonine mane was disordered. He turned on his pillow to see who his visitor might be, like some uncouth animal vaguely interested in a forest noise, and let the book in his hands slip to the floor. On a small table by his side were the remnants of a meal, and innumerable cigarette stubs.

"Humph!" was Shaftsbury's greeting. "That you, John? Thought it was Beulah, but wondered why she knocked."

He fell back comfortably on the pillow again, and crossed one leg high over the other, swinging a slippered foot as he spoke. He did not seem in the least concerned by Darrow's visit.

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"Have a cigarette?" he asked. He took one himself, and proffered the box to his guest.

"No, thanks," John sat down. "Where's Beulah?"

"Gone to get some matches. Didn't have a damned one in the place. Wonder you didn't meet her in the hall . . . say, want to hear my new poem?"

He stirred now, with the first show of enthusiasm, and from a shelf above him pulled down several sheets of paper. "Best thing I've ever done, John . . . Where you been keeping yourself?"

"That's what I was going to ask you," the younger man said. He hardly knew how to say what he had determined to say. He was disconcerted by the poet's nonchalance. Perhaps, after all, a ghastly mistake had been made. What if Elsie and Mortie had been wrong? Was this the great lover people had talked about? He couldn't imagine it, this morning. Yet he saw, in a way, what hypnotic attraction Martin might have for a woman. Beulah had told him that when he was alone with one of the opposite sex, he was thrillingly brilliant and personal. A drink oiled the wheels of his brain, and, thus stimulated, he proved the most absorbing conversationalist, and his eyes glowed with a fire that made one almost afraid. That flame in him, which mounted high enough when he was with a sympathetic man, roared to the very dome of heaven when he wanted to impress a woman; and seemingly he could call it forth at will. But there were times when he remained absolutely silent, and not even a spark shot from the furnace of his mind.

"Oh, I've been working on this poem, not going out much." He touched the leaves of his manuscript lovingly. "And then there were proofs to go over, and Beulah hasn't been well, so I've stayed home a lot."

John looked at him, and wondered how anyone could

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make these gestures of toil and duty in such childlike fashion, and think that the world believed him.

"You know as well as I do, Martin, that you've been going out a great deal—evenings. Come, let's not try to fool each other." Darrow had taken a chair, where he could directly face him.

"Want to hear my poem?" was Shaftsbury's rejoinder to this. It infuriated the other.

"No! damn it, no! But I want to hear your play for Miss Muir."

"Play?" Martin inquired naïvely, but letting the manuscript follow the book to the floor.

"Yes." If the poet could use monosyllables, so could he.

Shaftsbury turned over and rested his bulk on one arm. "Did you come down here just to say that?" he said. "If so, John, you're wasting your time. I'm one of the best friends you ever had."

"Why should you shout your friendship just now?" John was quick to challenge.

"Oh, one can't help hearing certain things." He was trying to put Darrow in the wrong, and the other knew it.

"One certainly cannot," the editor said. "That's why I'm here, Martin. We must have this thing out, once and for all. I'll get right to the point: You've been seen with Constance Muir."

"What in hell if I have? What is that to you?"

"I happen to be engaged to her, that's all," he replied, simply and quietly.

"So they say!" Martin growled. "But I heard she was engaged to someone in England, too. So just where do your claims come in?"

"Then you admit that you have been going about with Constance?"

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"Yes; but I see no reason why I shouldn't."

"You're married."

Shaftsbury roared with laughter, until he literally shook the corner of the room where he lay.

"*You* say that!" he cried. "Puritanical, all of a sudden, eh? What's come over you, boy? No wonder you're not much of an artist." He could be devilish in his frankness and sarcasm. "Get over these qualms of conscience. Beulah has me, good and hard—she's the woman who owns me, body and soul; but if I want to skim about on the fringes once in a while, for the good of my art, whose business is it but hers and mine?" He got up in a sitting position as he said it, and his eyes blazed. His mop of hair, through which he had run his hands several times, was now standing almost upright on his head, and he was as picturesque as a bad boy after a hard day's play.

"It's my business, when the woman you happen to play with is engaged to me. You're a damn fool, Martin; and you've gone too far this time."

"But if the girl is willing, who am I to say her no?" He laughed again, and stretched out his hands, opened his eyes wide, and looked as innocent as a baby. "Good God, man, we get few enough chances—even I get few enough in this stupid town; but when I find a beautiful woman willing to listen to my chatter, do you think I'm going to stay home, just because I might hurt *your* feelings? Come now, as brothers of the craft, I ask you to be fair! Art is long, and Time is fleeting! I can justify myself all along the way, my lad, and you and your stupid kind are not going to stop me!"

"I and my kind may seem stupid to you, Martin; but I'm nobody's fool. You're a bit of a rotter, it seems to me. Because of your talent, you think you can get away with anything; but I swear you can't.

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No one can. There are limits—even where an artist is concerned."

Shaftsbury looked at him, and couldn't help admiring him. It was so seldom that John lost his temper, that one forgot there might be volcanos beneath his gentle exterior. He didn't know but that he cared for him more when he was in a rage; for Shaftsbury liked drama, and had rarely been known to avoid a scene. Generally, however, he had to be drunk to be in his best fighting mood; and now, he was cold sober, and the morning sun streamed in to tell of the normal world outside.

"I suppose there *are* limits—according to your notions, my mid-Victorian friend," Shaftsbury answered. "But I refuse to recognize them. I have a code of my own, and damn it, I don't give the snap of my finger what you, or anybody else, thinks of it!" He fell back on his pillow, and the careless attitude he took was meant to express the disdain he felt for the world's restrictions.

"You have no sense of obligation to others, then?" John asked him.

"None whatever. What are you to me, except a go-between who helps me to reach my public? What is any magazine but a door through which I wander—and bring back some bread and butter to my wife!" He laughed, and then leaned over to pick up his precious manuscript and book. "I really care for no one very deeply—except Beulah. I can't stand attachments. They hedge me in. I like change. I'm a restless spirit; and no one shall tie me down—no one. You ought to realize all this by now. I'm selfish, maybe; but I mean to be selfish. It's the only way an artist ever gets along. What time would I have for my poetry if I cared too much about people? 'The world is too much with us.' . . . Here, let's drop this nonsense, and let me read you my poem."

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"No. I won't. I want to talk of ourselves—and Beulah. Don't you consider her, in all your philosophy about the artist's life?"

"Of course I do! Beulah understands me. A girl like Connie Muir (John winced at the use of the diminutive, counting it as a symbol of intimacy) knows how fond I am of my wife. But come, we men understand. Women are a necessity in our lives; but I wish they weren't. They're a confounded nuisance sometimes. They're making you and me quarrel now, when we ought to be talking of art—of this new poem of mine, of anything but them! What a mess they make of the world!" He rolled over, the unlighted cigarette drooping from his thick lips and wabbling up and down as he spoke, just as Nick Deeley's used to do in the old days.

"You're not going to evade me," John said. His voice was low and tense. He felt that Martin was trying to make him ridiculous, and he didn't mean to let him.

"So you come back to the fray?" Shaftsbury said, a sneer on his lips. "Well, what is it you want to say to me?"

"Just this: what have you been up to with Miss Muir?"

"What I'm generally up to with every pretty woman. I like 'em all—you know that."

Darrow could scarcely control himself now. To have the girl he loved merely a link in a nebulous chain of other women filled him with a savage fury. She was only a casual interest to the poet, then; she meant nothing more than a host of others who came and went in his unspeakable life! Yet if she had been more . . . "Damn you, Martin, I think I'll choke you for that!" he said, and rose, his hands clenched, his brow distorted, the subdued pain he felt now showing in his countenance. But Shaftsbury remained passive on the couch, almost insolently silent.

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"Look here," he said, finally, for John did not trust himself to move, "don't you know I'm the best friend you've got in this town—and I don't like people much, as I've told you. Why, I've dedicated my new book to you, you young fool, instead of to any of my women. I wasn't going to tell you—wanted to surprise you with it tomorrow when I was coming in to give you the first copy." He got up, and reached for a volume which, with five others, had just been sent him by his publishers. He opened the pages, and pointed to the inscription on the dedicatory page. "'To John Darrow,'" he read aloud, "'but for whose unfailing kindness many of these poems might never have seen the light.' There! does that mean nothing to you—isn't it worth more than all the woman stuff in the world?"

What could a man say in the face of such seeming evidence of regard? Sensible of what it must have meant to Shaftsbury to print so glowing a tribute, John could not speak. Frankly, he felt like a fool, standing there, accusing the poet of the basest behavior, and now receiving from the very man who had betrayed him, a proof of a curious sort of kindness. It was grotesque, hideous, a distortion of friendship; yet there it was, for everyone to see. And he knew that, sincere or insincere, it was a monstrous vindication in Shaftsbury's eyes. This public avowal could never be withdrawn; it was a record of the happy relation of the poet and the editor; and it stamped them as friends. Yet here they stood at this moment of publication as the bitterest of enemies. The riddle of Martin Shaftsbury was hard indeed to read; the amazing puzzle of his character, the intricate processes of his mind and heart were unfathomable. There were definitely two natures in him; he cared, and he didn't care. And with women it was exactly the same. The paradox of him! The ingenuity of the

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placid pond-lily with roots that one had better not see!

"Thank you—for this," Darrow said. "But much as I am touched by your thought of me on the printed page, it does not alter the fact that you have done me an injury. The pity of it all is that while you were writing those lines to me, you were a faithless friend. I'm sorry for you."

Shaftsbury was nonplussed. He knew that the young editor was absolutely right. It infuriated him. He had literally expected that all would be forgiven, all scores wiped out when he played his trump card and revealed the dedication. It made him furious that John accepted graciously, and at the same time spurned his vaunted and spectacular friendship.

"You're a fool, John Darrow!" he let out, in a low growling tone. "There! take that!" And, before the other was aware of it, he had thrown the book in his face —the book that he had dedicated to him. It struck him on the right cheek, and fell with a heavy thud upon the floor, falling, whimsically enough, with the fly-leaf fluttering open.

With blind madness, John, though half the other's size, obeyed the natural impulse of any man, and struck the poet a heavy blow which sent his huge form whirling on the couch behind him.

At that moment the door was pushed open, and Beulah stood staring at them both, a little cry of agony and dismay on her lips.

IV

"You needn't worry, Beulah. I haven't hurt him much. He fell on the couch, not on the floor."

His voice sounded far away to him. His lips had become suddenly dry. His heart was beating fast. The poet's wife looked so little and helpless, so shabby and

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frail. She clutched a small package in her hands, and John knew it must contain the matches her husband had sent her to fetch for him. He was conscious that the huge form of Shaftsbury was pulling itself together, trying to get back some of its lost dignity.

"Oh, I'm sorry—but what does all this mean?" Beulah said, coming further into the room and looking bewilderedly about her. Her first thought was of Martin, and she went over and tenderly grasped one of his arms.

"Never mind me," her husband told her. "I'm all right. A little fit of temperament on John's part—that's all. Silly ass."

With a woman's intuition she knew at once what it meant; she, too, had heard the rumors of Constance Muir and her poet husband—in fact, she knew all the time what was happening, and one evening she had pulled him home after he had escaped her and gone up the street as far as Broadway. But she was used to that. All her life she had trailed after him, grown thin in her hours of worry.

"You child!" John heard her saying now, to that monster behind him. And he thought of the wonder of woman—of Elsie, the day before, looking after that boy, and now this tiny creature filling the room with her great love for her giant baby.

"I'm sorry, Beulah. We did have a beastly row." Darrow was picking up his hat and stick and gloves, and moving toward the door.

"You two children!" little Beulah said. "And on the day when Martin's book was coming out! . . . Did you show him the dedication, dear?"

Martin growled that he had; and the whole absurd situation was relieved by the two men in the second or two of silence that followed.

"Oh, John, I thought you, of all people, would understand Martin! He'll always be like this—you can't alter

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him one bit. No one can—not even me." Her pale face looked up at him—she was very close to him now; and Shaftsbury, having got himself up from the couch at last, leaned over to pick up his cherished manuscript. Evidently he had heard Beulah say this over and over again—she had spent half her life in explaining her husband, making excuses and allowances for him. How could she go on doing it? She must love him beyond all naming—she who knew his every peccadillo.

John's one thought was to get away, get out of the room, where once more he could think coherently. He had been in a daze for twenty-four hours; he couldn't stand the strain much longer. He saw why Martin was spoiled; yet perhaps there was no other way for Beulah to manage a man like him. She took him as he was, and told him so, in the presence of others. Well, it was for her to fight out her own destiny then, with him, and for Martin to fight out his with her. They could not be changed, these two. But how could she forgive him time after time, and go on caring for that hulking, disorderly, disquieting male? Yet he himself had forgiven him over and over again, and so had many others, times innumerable, when they had vowed they were finished, that this was the last straw.

"We must all be comprehending," Beulah's low voice was running on. "Martin has always liked you, counted you his friend in more ways than one; and now—this. . . ." Her lip quivered. "Can't you see that Martin is just—Martin; a genius, different from us all?"

The lion growled approval. Before John could answer, Beulah was continuing, the while she stroked her lion's mane:

"And he has always thought you so wonderful to us, and liked to talk books with you—said you were one of the few who really knew, and understood. You both

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love Keats. Well, that ought to stop any row you may have had. Don't you think so, John?" She looked up at him in that appealing way she had; and the unconscious humor of her remark hit John's heartstrings. How could anyone be so generous and elemental as Beulah?

"You're a wonder," he said to her. "No one—no mere man deserves a wife like you. But sometimes I wonder if . . . No, it wouldn't be fair to say that." He started for the door in earnest now.

"Aren't you going to shake hands with me?" Martin called out. John turned. Ah! this massive poet was only a child, after all; and now, more rumpled than ever, swaying like an elephant, a pathetic smile on his face, he held out one arm. He looked shamefaced, crestfallen, miserable.

"Of course—if you want to," Darrow said. And they gripped. Beulah was all smiles.

"Oh, you two!" she cried. "Men are just—infants, aren't they? . . . Here, John, read Martin's new poem when you get back to the office. It's wonderful!" And before he knew it she had slipped the manuscript into his pocket. "And oh, here's your copy of Martin's book!"

Somehow he found the stairs, and was off, wondering how long it would be before "time, that aged nurse, rocked him to patience."

V

He would go to his rooms for awhile, and think things out. His mind was filled with currents, turning and twisting in every direction. The light gaiety of the city, in its April dress, hurt him. He wanted no luncheon; he wanted nothing except to be alone.

The moment he saw his own book-lined walls, his

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desk, his few favorite pictures, he knew he would feel something akin to peace. Up those old, creaking stairs he knew how well he could shut the world away from him; and he always kept some manuscripts about, so that, when the office got on his nerves, he could slip over to the quiet of this place and find himself again.

It was an old-fashioned brick-and-stone building, on a corner, and so the light came in from two sides, filling both his sitting-room and his bedroom with a soft, kindly glow. When the lamps were lit in the evening, and the distant traffic had died down completely, he thought this was heaven. Then it was that those battalions of old writers—yes, and a few new ones—spoke to him, whispered to him in the half-darkness. The long centuries of literature filed before him, and he was happy in that great company which had gone—yet had never gone. He talked with Wordsworth when the agate city weighed him down until he was afraid he might forget the greenness of hillsides, the simplicity of the sky. Browning brought him back to a world of men when he followed too long some gipsy trail; and "The Three Musketeers," which had come to be a sort of Bible to him, was always breathing on the table by his bed. For Borrow and Lamb and Hazlitt he had the wildest love; but there were moments when "Madame Bovary" seemed to meet his every spiritual need—that complete, that perfect novel. But always he turned to Keats as his final refuge in any crisis, and put on that aching beauty of Endymion or the sonnets, as one might put on some gorgeous garment and feel richer for the princely robe. These were some of the friends whose mere presence in his rooms told him that life was worth while and that the sharpness and sting and tang of it were somehow good. He knew that with this background the days could never be bleak; that no matter what failures in friendship or love he might ex-

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perience, these great bankers of dreams would never desert him; and out of their treasure-houses he could draw abundantly, at will.

Today, when he came among them, he was aware of their voices, shut in those rows of volumes, and his hand went automatically, almost, to Swinburne, for he wanted to read again that peace-giving hymn in "Atalanta,"

"Before the beginning of years,
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran;
Pleasure, with pain for leaven;
Summer, with flowers that fell;
Remembrance fallen from heaven,
And madness risen from hell;
Strength without hands to smite;
Love that endures for a breath;
Night, the shadow of light,
And life, the shadow of death."

But as he started to remove the book, he saw on the shelf above it, where his old housekeeper always put his letters and messages, a yellow envelope; and at once some strange, inner voice told him that it contained ill news.

Only ten brief words, yet they changed the whole aspect of life for him. He tore open the envelope and read:

"Mother passed away suddenly this morning. Please come home.

"ETHEL."

A boy had carried those flaming words through the city streets to his door, unconscious of their tragic import.

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"'Life, the shadow of death,'" John Darrow kept repeating to himself during those blind hours that necessarily intervened before he could catch a train to Stockton.

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CHAPTER VII

I

THEY owned the little house in Stockton—a simple enough place, with about an acre of land around it, on one of the remoter streets. From the back porch there was a wonderful view up and down that blue-and-green valley; and the high hills, which were almost mountains, kept perpetual guard through the rushing seasons. He knew by heart how the trees were placed on certain hillsides—they were photographed on his brain; and he always remembered how the mountain road twisted, trying to find its difficult way into the next valley, and settling down comfortably once in a while to this serious business.

It would be different now for him; for he knew how his mother had loved to look at this same scene from her upper window—from that very room in which she had died. A mist came before his eyes as the train whirled him into the valley. He was almost there—only a few miles more and he would see the familiar rickety station, the dust-covered omnibuses, the bed of geraniums near a coal-bin which a nature-loving ticket-agent had planted long ago, and kept in blossom through several months of the year.

His sister Margaret had married three years before, and was living on a small farm just outside the town. That had left only his mother and Aunt Em and Ethel in the house on Cedar street; but Hal Grantland, Margaret's

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husband, a fine type of American manhood, had kept the Darrow household well supplied with everything they needed from his overflowing bins and pastures and gardens. Moreover, as often as their busy lives permitted, they drove into the village, or insisted that the three women come out to the farm; and John was comfortably calm in the knowledge that his brother-in-law was in effect the man of the house.

But death creates inevitable changes for those who are left behind. In the shock of bereavement, John did not have time to think how Ethel and Aunt Em Pryor could live alone in Cedar street, protected though they might be by kindly neighbors, and Hal and Margaret, only a mile up the road. There would have to be some readjustment; many things would have to be talked over around a family council-table. He was the real head of the household now; and whatever new burdens came he would accept them and carry them on his shoulders.

His sisters and his aunt wept on his arrival; and Hal, who was several years his senior, had stepped in valiantly and done the initial mechanical things which someone must do, always, at such a time. Telegrams, telephone messages, notices for the papers must be written and sent, though the heart bleeds and breaks. Those who fare on to some mystical borderland make doubly real to the living, the practical world which they have just left. They are serenely aloof from fret and turmoil; but the wheels of life must go on turning, though in their majestic peace they slumber unknowing.

They were the three most difficult weeks he ever went through; and it was not until May came in, with its white gospel of apple blossoms, that he was able to return to the city.

Ethel, a hoyden no longer, but a rather serious young woman, seemed completely undone by her mother's death.

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She told John that she didn't know how she could ever go on, and she even cast out a hint that now he ought to come back and live with them in Stockton. He could write so well here, and they could be so happy. She did not realize, of course, that once the dreadful city has ensnared one, he is powerless to leave it. Moreover, he had a living to earn, not only for himself, but for them, for the home was all his mother bequeathed; and he was by no means well enough established to think of devoting his entire time to writing. Also . . . but he could not tell Ethel of certain other ties that held him. She and the rest of the family had become sure that John would never marry. The tragedy of Mary Gwynne would haunt his life, they said; and he would have no time, no place in his heart, for another woman. They thought they understood his temperament; but they knew him not at all.

If he had told them that he had not forgotten Mary, yet had felt that somehow he must go on with new hopes and natural aspirations, they would not have known what he meant. Therefore he never wrote home of those romantic events so close to him; and they had come to think of John as a monastic spirit, apart from gross contacts with the world, miraculously different from the average run of men. It is possible that every mother thinks of her son in that way. It never occurred to the women in his family that he had a man's life to lead; that Stockton was shaken from him forever, so far as its being his home—that had happened, indeed, as far back as his college days; and they were unaware of his needs, his secret dreams and his passionate desire to see them fulfilled. It was not that he had been false to a dead love. He never could erase the memory of those happiest hours of his youth, when the rose first opens and the world begins to whisper of the supreme rapture

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around us. But there are gardens everywhere. Delight lures us at every turning; and to a man of John's nature, brooding and an endless torrent of tears would have been impossible; indeed, they would have been abhorrent, almost immoral. He thought of life as a perpetual going on to something new. Not that one was utterly to forget the beauties and sanctities of the past; sometimes these memories were an armor to shield one in perilous times of the spirit. How often Mary's face had come before him, no one ever knew. He always kept certain letters of hers, as faith for cloudy days; and he experienced moments when. . . . But such sacred fragments from the past a man does not speak of—to his immediate family, least of all.

Women, whose very weakness and helplessness make them appallingly strong, generally get what they desire. Ethel clung about John's neck, and let him see, in those troubled days, the tears still wet upon her cheeks; and when she heard him set the time for his departure, she no longer hinted, she asked outright that he make some arrangement so that he could be with them for long week-ends. How could this be accomplished? She did not care; she almost demanded that he come frequently to relieve her loneliness. In that very demand, though of course she did not know it, she lost something of her brother—something that could never be put into words. He saw no need of doing what she wished; but he could not bring himself to argue with a bereaved sister. He could almost hear the click of the gyves upon his wrist; yet if he was to be bound, he himself would keep the key. Aunt Em was placid, half weeping, too; and though John loved them both, he longed for the moment when he could get the train to New York. He wanted to forget his own sorrow in the hardest kind of work. He knew that it was the best anodyne.

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"Yes, I'll come—as often as I can," he heard himself saying in the hall, when his bags were packed and Ethel came out of her room to bid him a long, clinging farewell.

"Oh, John, I'm so glad, for we need you so, don't we, Aunt Em?"

Aunt Em, a piece of knitting in her hands, which she had discarded only for the funeral, echoed what her niece said; and John looked down at Ethel's pink cheeks and gray eyes, fringed with thick lashes, and wondered why she did not attract men in the way that the plainer Margaret had always done. If she would marry. . . . Ah! that would be a solution of all his difficulties; for then Aunt Em could live with one of the married pair. Yet the next moment he loathed himself for such a thought, and counted it almost as disloyal. He had no right to think of arranging their lives; and yet—well, they were always trying to arrange his. Every one was; or trying to disarrange it, he bitterly thought.

He had written Constance a brief note on the afternoon of his departure, saying nothing except that his mother had died and he did not know when he could return to the city. A telegram of sympathy awaited him when he reached Stockton; and there came, of course, a note of condolence, written in her great English scrawl. Beyond that, he received no word from her. He could not write himself, amid the host of things he had to do; why should he expect each post would bring something from her? Yet he did; and now, the heavy fever of grief over, he felt a new bitterness rising in his heart. He wondered if they were not the fortunate who went away, like his mother? Life seemed to be a perpetual storm, and he found himself, in that terrible hour of disillusion, envying the quiet dead, sleeping under the hills of the world.

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Then, as his train shot down the valley, he caught glimpses of ghostly orchards, the branches of the apple trees bright with the candles of Spring; and he pitied those who had left this radiant earth, which seemed suddenly almost too achingly beautiful, too magical with May.

II

Though her play had been an enormous success, the first warm wave that struck the city caused the crowds to diminish; and before John Darrow had come back to New York, Constance's company had been disbanded and the Empire was closed for the season.

It was a changed city that he saw—changed in many ways for him. She had sailed for England a few days before he returned; and there was a letter for him in his room, which had been sent by messenger. On that same shelf it lay, above Swinburne.

She told him she had seen Shaftsbury. "Oh, I know you have thought the worst—how could you, John?" she exclaimed on the scented paper. "That is why I have not written to you at Stockton. I was afraid you would return before I went back home—yes, I sail tomorrow; *and I did not want to see you.* I could not bear a scene with you—with you, whom I loved so much!"

Then she went on and utterly denied any wrong. "You have simply heard some stupid gossip, which always floats about concerning people of the theatre. You have allowed your poetic imagination to run away with you. I dislike telling you all this, while you are still under the burden of your sorrow; but love and life are as important as death, and I *must* speak."

Melodramatic! John thought. Indeed, between the lines he caught a sense of guilt, a vibration as though she

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dreaded not only facing him, but her own soul on that long trip home. "You will ask for my forgiveness one of these days," Constance continued. "Suspicion has clouded your reason; but it may interest you to know that your laziness and dilatoriness have lost you a glorious opportunity. I am sailing back with a finished play by Martin Shaftsbury under my arm—it might just as well have been one by you!"

It was the cruelty of that thrust which hurt him unutterably. She could speak of such things to him—now. He might never see her again; it was over, finished, done. What was his life to be without her? he wondered. A great emptiness.

Two women that he had loved in different ways—Mary Gwynne and his mother—had vanished, forever. Nothing could call them back. But they were not more remote from him than the writer of this letter, which he held, as in a daze, in his hand. Only an ocean divided them; but they were worlds and worlds apart; while the spirits of those others now stood close to him—yes, touched him, breathed on him. They would never leave him, though they were gone from this world forever. He was to learn that there is nothing sadder than the ghost of dead love.

He put his head down on his desk, in that still room, and for the first time wept as men seldom weep. It was not an unmanly grief. But there are moments when, with his temperament, it was necessary for the floodgates to open. He had begun to see that many people are emotionally dishonest. They take, and take, and give nothing in return save a spurious affection. His lofty idealism was lost upon them. He expected the same high sense of spiritual attachment which he gave; and when disappointment came, he suffered as a child suffers with its first realization of the pitilessness of the world.

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There was a tap on his door, a half hour later; and when he opened it, Nick Deeley stood there. The two grasped hands, and not a word was uttered. Nick saw that John had suffered—his face seemed to have changed.

"What you need is a cozy dinner with me," Nick said. "Come, we'll dine alone at the Hoffman House, and then go to see 'Florodora.' It will do you good, old man."

Only an artist will understand John Darrow that night. He did as Nick suggested; and they both drank too much, up and down the glittering lane of Broadway. The Gilsey House, even the old ramshackle Sturtevant House, called them, and the bright effulgence of Herald Square, with its hurrying crowds moving in all directions. There are times when a man must forget; and in those pools of liquor into which one looks and sees visions of a false paradise, they lost themselves, and were not ashamed of their momentary ecstasy.

III

He went to Stockton many times that Summer. It seemed to him that he was always going or coming away. He carried manuscripts with him—they had come to be as much a part of him as the clothing he wore—and read on the train; and after he got there he read again, to keep up with his growing work.

At first, Ethel complained that when he came home he apparently did nothing but devote himself to those piles of stories and poems and essays; but when it was made clear to her that if he didn't do just that he couldn't come at all, she said no more. Yet always the little feeling of jealousy for his work persisted. She could not understand, full-grown woman though she was, that all her comforts and blessings emerged from those same dull-looking manuscripts; without them, John could not have

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traveled northward so often, and given them all a glimpse of himself.

She noticed, as women will, that he looked tired and fagged. There was a new sadness in his eyes; but this she attributed to their mother's death. How he must have quietly suffered!

"Why don't you write more poetry?" she asked him one day, as they sat on the back veranda, looking out on the opulent hills, now in the green fulness of Summer. She spoke as though one merely turned on a faucet, and lines dripped out.

John, who had been reading incessantly for several hours, was glad to pause and "look off," as his mother used to say, to rest his eyes and brain.

"Oh, I don't have the time," he answered. "It's hard for me to concentrate—now."

"If you could only—" she was going to say "live up here," but thought better of it and went on with only the shadow of a pause, "drown your grief in your writing, you would be all right again. Mother always kept a scrap-book with your things in it." There was a little catch in her throat as she said it.

He felt guilty, for he had not been thinking of his mother just then. He could not tell Ethel so. She lived only with thoughts of her great loss. She and her mother had been so close in late years.

"I know it," he said. "Dear mother! she was so foolishly proud of the least thing I wrote."

To his utter amazement, his sister burst into tears.

"Oh, how can you say such a thing—of mother!" she gasped out at him between her heavy sobs.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"C-calling her—'foolishly proud!'" Ethel wept. "H-how *can* you—your own mother, too!"

John thought she must have suddenly gone mad. He

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simply looked at her solemnly for a moment, huddled grotesquely in her rocking-chair, and was relieved when Aunt Em, with her eternal knitting (no more eternal, though, than his manuscripts) opened the screen door and came out to join them. She saw Ethel's head buried in her arms, and was aware at once of John's expression of confusion and alarm.

"Why, what's all this?" she wanted to know. "Ethel, whatever ails you, child?" She often called her "child" since her dear sister's death. The word gave her a vicarious sense of motherhood.

"It's nothing at all," John spoke up, as Ethel continued to splutter in the chair. "Just a touch of nerves, I guess."

"It—it isn't nerves at all! It's you, John!" his sister cried, rubbing her eyes. "You shouldn't have said it!"

"This beats all hollow," John said. "Why do you accuse me of something which is not true, which you ought to know is not true? I swear, Ethel, you make it very difficult for me sometimes."

At this, she burst into a new flood of weeping, and before he could cross the veranda, as he intended to do, and put his arm about her and tell her to be sensible, she had risen wildly, in her old hoydenish way, and stormed into the house. He and his aunt looked at each other in blank amazement.

"I haven't the least idea what it's all about," John told her, when the screen banged as though it, too, were part of one of Ethel's sentences. "It's amazing how differences spring up when Ethel's around. Sometimes I can hardly stand the strain."

"Don't worry. I know what it all means. She's had a tiff with Fraser, and it's upset her."

"Fraser Middleton?" He was a clerk in the Stockton bank.

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"Yes. He wants her to marry him this Autumn, but she won't. And dear Hattie would have been the last person to keep her from it, if she could speak. You know how she abominated mourning; yet Ethel will wear it, and make us all doubly sad whenever she comes around. Strange, isn't it, how different the children in one family can be?" And Aunt Em looked off dreamily at the hills, as if the world and its problems were sometimes far too much for her.

"It's strange that Ethel hasn't told me about this," John said. "I knew she must have someone—that would go without saying. Maybe she wanted to surprise me? I've always liked Fraser. Mother mentioned him once or twice to me, but I never put two and two together."

Then he thought of his own secrets. Why should others tell theirs, when he revealed so little of his own life? And after all, Ethel had felt her mother's death very deeply, and there had been little time since in which they could talk quietly. She was thirty now—high time she got her a husband; and if Fraser couldn't afford to take her to a home of his own providing, they could occupy this place, and Aunt Em could stay on with them. The property was his, and he would even turn it over to Ethel, so that she could be sure of a permanent dwelling-place. Fraser would like it, too—that would go without saying. His salary at the bank couldn't be very much. He was lonely, and lived at the hotel on the main street of the town. How fine even the simple Darrow place would seem to him, and with what pride and joy he would turn the key in the front door, or ring the bell!

But it is one thing to arrange the affairs of others in one's mind, and quite another to see those plans fulfilled. Ethel was shocked when Fraser proposed to her so soon after her mother's death. She had always rather liked him; but she thought his asking her at such a time re-

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vealed a certain lack of fineness in him, unsuspected until then. Moreover, she had a plan in the back of her head. She did not want to remain in Stockton; and she saw marriage as a chain around her, forever holding her there. She knew that John, in his generosity, would give her the house and grounds. Aunt Em knew it too; and life would go on in practically the same old way—a monotony of days and weeks which grew into months and years. She had taught school for a time in the town, but she was not a disciplinarian—she was too temperamental herself to manage children; and when her mother's illness made it imperative for someone to be with her almost constantly, she used that as a reason for resigning. If the great city called young men, why should it not call young women? That Margaret was content to remain in the town was something she could not understand. John had escaped—oh, the men always had the better of it, in everything! But now that she was free to come and go as she wished, she did not intend to remain mutely in Cedar street, and fall into line for marriages—yes, that's just what it amounted to. Fraser might be all right—his family was as good as any in Stockton; but he had none of her brother John's character and force. He would be satisfied to go on at the bank, and life would come to mean a humdrum of stupid days. She often looked at the hollyhocks she had planted at the back of their garden, and likened her years to their monotonous line. A slight difference in color the flowers on each of the great stalks had; but the difference was so slight that it hardly counted. Was she to be planted in this garden of Stockton, and left to look out on the hills, and nod in the drowsy summer afternoons? If that was to be her fate she didn't see how she was going to stand it. When Fraser proposed to her, she saw Fate putting a chain about her. He was one more link to hold her; and she

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did care for him, she discovered. She must get away before it was too late, before she would be unable to control her destiny. Ethel was not a fool; and she realized that if she lost her head over Fraser she was doomed. "I would rather be a librarian in New York, and live in a hall bedroom, than be the wife of a Stockton bank clerk and live in a whole house here!" she said to herself.

But even as she said it, Fraser came up the path and knocked on the door; and she let him in, and forgot John and Aunt Em on the back veranda, and went for a drive with the man from whom she was intending to flee.

IV

During the next few weeks John was busy in New York. He had asked Aunt Em to keep him informed concerning Ethel and Fraser. She was his ardent ally, for she was fond of the old home nest where she had lived with her sister until the latter's death. She could not bear the thought of being transplanted, even to Margaret's home, and she was wise enough to see that if she influenced Ethel, for John's sake, she would not find herself on the fringes of the family, but would remain an integral part of the new household. Her big square room in the brick house—she had taken her sister's bedroom by natural right—opened out upon the mountainside; and she had come to love the view of the road that twisted upward, and went lackadaisically over the hills. She was content to live on with Ethel alone, with her knitting, her books and a few intimate friends whom she had made in the course of her church work. Why couldn't young people be equally satisfied? She threw out hint after hint as to Fraser's great desirability; and she even went so far as to suggest that Ethel's mother would have been the last person on earth to postpone her daughter's happiness. And she knew, from experience, that if women wait too

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long they do not catch the bait, for none is thrown out. There she was, a living proof of tragic spinsterhood; did Ethel mean to follow in her lonely path?

"No," the girl made answer, "but I am as much entitled to a career as John."

"It depends upon what you mean by a career," Aunt Em told her. "Sometimes marriage is the greatest career of all, especially for a woman. I hate this idea of girls earning their living. I don't know what's come over the younger generation, wanting the vote, wanting to work. In my time——"

And she launched forth on one of her interminable lectures as to the state the world was coming to, with women losing their femininity—the very thing they should retain, if they wanted husbands.

"But all women don't want husbands," Ethel contended. "You yourself love your missionary work, Aunt Em."

"Of course. But that's only a way of pouring out the love I might have poured out on a family of my own," her aunt replied. She said it very quietly, but Ethel caught the note of pathos beneath the words, and looked away. There was no answer she could make. Somehow she had never thought of Aunt Em wishing, or needing, a husband. She had taken it for granted that she had no desires beyond the Ladies' Home Missionary Circle of the First M. E. Church. Yet she, too, dreamed, she was suddenly aware, of what she had lost, when she looked out on those green hills, or down that sweeping valley through afternoons of blue delight. Every woman thought of such things; and if she waited too long she also would. . . . But the thought gave her a moment of fright. People had whispered, no doubt, that she was an old maid, though she did not look her age. But in a place like Stockton everyone was tabulated; and their family Bible was literally an open book, with its record of

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the year of her birth. She had thought of that when John filled in the sad memorandum of their mother's death. She saw her own name there, after Margaret's, with the indisputable year of her coming into the world; and though no one knew it, she shuddered a little. Yes, she was "getting on"; only a few more years, and she would be a back number. Perhaps, after all, she was lucky to have Fraser hanging about. She might do worse; yet to be down in that great city, with John so near her. . . . That would be living, while this . . .

She wrote to her brother, and told him she could not marry—just yet. With his influence, couldn't he get her a position in a library? She had won a puzzle contest in a woman's magazine, and had fifty dollars in her pocket. Therefore she could pay all her own expenses to New York. Since their mother's death she was aware that John bore most of the burden of her support. Aunt Em had but a trifle of her own, and their father's life insurance had lasted until Mrs. Darrow passed away. Though she was dependent upon John, she did not like to admit it. In fact, she chafed under it, and had she but known it, her desire to earn her own living was a spiritual reaction against an uncomfortable and galling situation.

John replied to her letter, merely saying that he was coming to Stockton the following week-end, and would talk to her. She knew what that meant. He was not going to raise his finger for her in New York.

"You were right," he was telling her, as they sat alone under the pear tree in the little garden back of the house. "I am not going to help you to come to New York, Ethel. I can't support you there—I can't run two households. Has it never dawned on you that I may wish to marry?" He looked her straight in the eye.

"You, too, talk of marrying—so soon after Mother's death?" she said, and whimpered a little.

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"And why not? Life must go on. Here you are calmly talking of a 'career' in New York. I can't see the difference." He smiled.

"Why, John, what a brute you are!" Ethel cried. "I wanted to relieve you of the expense of—of supporting me—that was all! And that's all the thanks I get!" She pulled out her handkerchief, and lifted it to her eyes.

"Don't do that, Ethel—don't burst into tears—I can't stand it. I'm going to be very frank with you. I am *not* thinking of getting married—I'm not even engaged—now." There was a little catch in his voice. "But I *am* in love with my work, and I want to go on with it, for all I am worth. I dream of writing a book—two books—plays, poetry; and I am fighting to get free from all restraints. I can't be an editor all my life, and make the kind of name for myself that I hope to make. You could help me immeasurably, if you only would. You speak of relieving me of the burden of supporting you. Well, marrying Fraser Middleton would help me more than anything else. For the life of me, I don't see why you can't see things as I do. And as Aunt Em does."

"So—you've been discussing me and my love affair with Aunt Em!" she cried hotly.

"Of course, you silly! How could I help it? It's of vital concern to us all. Fraser's a good fellow, a darned sight more thrilling than a dull library in some dim street in the big city. You'd have to take a hall bedroom in a boarding house—it's all *I* could afford, all you could afford—for a year or two. I've been through it, Ethel, and I know. I've laughed with you over my Brooklyn meals. It's easy enough to laugh when a thing's over. But I wouldn't go through it again; and I want to save you from it."

She looked off at the hollyhocks, and the old thought came back to her. She was beaten; she knew it. She was

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not fitted to be a librarian. She was born to be a Stockton bank clerk's wife. She was a small-town girl—woman. Yes, she was indeed a woman now. Oh, what was the use in fighting? But she saw, she felt sure, that John was growing away from her; that he had other interests now outside the family. He didn't like coming to Stockton; it bored him. And in a flood of anger at her defeat, she told him so.

He didn't believe she had said it at first. He searched her face. She thought him selfish, and cruel, and unbrotherly.

"Well, think so," he stated. "Perhaps what you say is true—but I hadn't analyzed my feelings until now. It *has* been a bore to come up here, week after week, Ethel, and hear nothing but complaints from you, and see nothing but tears. Mother's death was as great a shock to me as it was to you; but all our grieving isn't going to bring her back again. I may have a different conception of death than you. I count those who die as very happy. Oh, not that we who go on living are not happy, too! We can be, if we wish. We can be happy in our work, and with our dreams and ambitions—and with each other." He leaned over and put his hand in hers. "For God's sake, Ethel, see things as I see them. I'm not selfish—but I'm only beginning to realize that if I'm ever to accomplish a thing in this world, I've got to be free and untrammeled. You can't leave Aunt Em with Margaret—that wouldn't be fair, or right. And you can't. . . ."

He paused, for there was a step on the path behind them.

"Why, here's Fraser!" he said. And Ethel looked up to see him almost upon them. He was about two years her senior, and he always wore a smile and a flower in his buttonhole. He was not exactly good looking, but he

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was intelligent, and friendly, and his feeling for Ethel had endured despite her flighty nature.

"Aunt Em said you were both back here," the young man said, "and I just came around."

John left them. He had a strange longing to go down to Main street and see old Putnam Travis and his printing shop. The scent of the roses was lovely; but somehow the smell of printer's ink was what he craved today. He never could get away from it.

There it was—that untidy, disreputable little row of windows—and Putnam was standing in his shirt sleeves at the door, smoking a pipe. John loved the old printer, with his old-fashioned presses, his slow, deliberate methods of doing business. He was still printing the Stockton *Mercury,* and things had perked up for him. But how small the shop looked, after all these years! Just as the little red schoolhouse on the hill had shrunk when he came back from college; just as the village grew smaller every time he returned from monstrous New York. Even old Putnam seemed smaller.

Why did the old, loved things diminish? Was it worth getting out into the world, if one's perspective got to be all wrong—or all right? As a boy, he had thought of this shop as huge, magnificent, overwhelming. Today, it seemed no bigger than a dime. But he went in, and talked with Putnam Travis the rest of the afternoon, and smoked his head off, and listened to the old fellow's fears about the invasion of linotype machines. "They'll no more come than horseless carriages'll really come!" the printer contended. "Oh, I know we've got some; but they won't last—they'll all break down. You've got to have horses to pull, and men to set type. That's all there is to it, John. Darn these newfangled ways. I like old houses, an' old books, an'—old friends."

Old friends! It was men like Putnam Travis who were

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the real people, after all. What had New York given to him? Only a lot of blows, with intervals of love and success. Yet he never could have stayed on here, in Stockton, and become a Putnam Travis. He had to go over the rim of the world. And just as, in his boyhood, he had desired to climb the mountain road, and see what lay in the next valley, so he had to leave the little town with its little shop, and find the giant city with its myriad pounding presses. But it was wonderful to have these old simplicities eternally in the background—the small brick house on Cedar street, and the little shop, smelling so sweet to him, where the *Mercury* laboriously came into the world every week. He felt that some things lasted, after all, though love hid its face and friends proved false. Thank God, he murmured to himself, as he went down the street through the warm twilight, for the Putnam Travises of the world, and for a few old enduring customs!

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CHAPTER VIII

I

H. S. was happier than he had ever been. The November number of the *Arcadian* lay on his desk, in a sprightly new cover; and though the first five pages of it were given over to Martin Shaftsbury's poem, "The Cups of Autumn,"—that poem which Beulah had thrust into John's hands the day of the quarrel—he found the rest of the contents greatly to his liking. Mortie Langdon's essay sparkled like champagne; and Elsie Triggert's sketches were deliciously amusing. It was wonderful. And there were the subscriptions rolling in, and the dollar bills almost burying the long table in Nick Deeley's office. No wonder H. S. was delighted, and rubbed his thin hands and caressed his ebony hair, brushing back a lock that always fell heavily over his forehead. And no wonder Major Moulton and his wife were jubilant, and came frequently to the office, to see with their own eyes the cataract of dollar bills as they poured into the cashier's cage.

H. S. heard them now in the outer room, and he sprang from his desk to greet them.

"Now, Majormoulton," he could hear the young wife saying, "don't be in such a rush! H. S.'ll be here in a minute. Don't you want to see Mr. Darrow first?"

But no! the Major was anxious to see the money first—tangible bills interested him far more than nebulous plans

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for future numbers. And already he was on his way to H. S.'s office, when the latter came out and they all but collided in the passageway.

"Great, isn't it, Major?" H. S. said, in his heavy voice. He radiated the joy he inwardly felt. His salary had just been increased. Life was a primrose path. He had everyone working hard, and the clatter of typewriters was always a song in his ears.

"How many today?" the Major asked, a broad smile illuminating his face.

"Oh, hundreds!" H. S. replied. "Hundreds! We'll go in and see the green cascade." He had stolen that phrase from Darrow.

Followed by Mrs. Moulton, they bowed right and left at this clerk and that, and Peter made way for them, proud to be a member of so successful an organization.

Nick Deeley was busy opening subscription letters. Two young girls were assisting him. With long cutters they tore the envelopes rapidly open, and those standing near could see the joyful contents drop out. From Wyoming, California, Idaho, New Mexico, New England, Florida, Mississippi, Michigan—from every state in the Union the money trickled in.

"Glorious!" the Major cried. "Simply glorious! We must celebrate in some way."

"Now, Majormoulton, don't go to work and spend everything the minute you get it," his cautious wife warned.

"Oh, we ought to do somethin' for H. S. and Mr. Deeley," the old man insisted. "This is unheard of—a campaign keepin' up so many months."

Nick could not stop his work long enough to talk with them directly. He had become so interested in the *Arcadian* that he would not hire any additional girls to open the growing mail, but plunged in himself and did most of

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the work. He loved it all; and he and H. S. had formed a quiet mutual-admiration society. H. S. was sure he had picked a winner, as he put it, with his usual originality, and Nick was convinced that no man in the business knew more about advertising and printing and publicity than H. S. Templeton. They lunched together frequently, talking over fresh plans and schemes, discussing everyone and everybody from Peter to Darrow and the Major.

"A picnic—a barbecue would be the very thing!" Nick heard the Major saying. "Down at our Staten Island place. What do you say, Fanny?" But as he asked the question he knew she would disapprove. She was getting economical as they grew richer.

"Oh, let's wait awhile," was her answer.

"But this is the very time of the year—the weather's just right. October days, just crisp enough—as crisp as those bills!" he winked in the direction of the diligent Nick and the girls.

"Just as you say then, Majormoulton. He loves nothing better than a party," she said to H. S.

"Keeps me young," the Major said, puffing out his chest, and puffing his long cigar. "Nothin' like fun to keep you in trim."

"That's right," said H. S., following them about—they wanted to see John Darrow. "But we must work, in order to appreciate our holidays. Wasn't it Browning who said, 'If all the years were playing holiday—' " His voice trailed off; for he saw Darrow coming toward them, and he knew that John would smile at his clumsy attempts to be literary.

II

Everybody had been invited to the barbecue. John called it a "Table of Contents" banquet; but those left

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out called it a "Table of Discontents" affair. He had Elsie Triggert draw a picture of the Major and his wife beckoning their guests to their rambling Staten Island home; and in the background one could see a long table set in the trees, with negroes running here and there. And he wrote some verses that were but doggerel:

"The Major and his better half
Want you to come and dance and laugh,
Eat the ox and succulent pig,
Drink their health; be *infra dig.*,
And stay as long as you are able
Around their groaning dinnertable,"

and so on through three or four verses. It sounded like a jolly gathering; and sure enough it was.

A Saturday morning of brown and gold floated into the cool world. There was a tang in the air, an odor of burning brush when the writers and artists reached the shore of Staten Island, and took the heavy trolley that went almost to the Major's door. The leaves were just beginning to tremble to the ground, shaking their fiery way to the grass. The Major, having gotten along in years, had bought this old place, and fixed it up to his desire. The city had begun to get on his nerves; so the house uptown was abandoned, and this delightful gray-stone edifice had come to be his home. It had a mansard slate roof, and French windows on the ground floor that led from the capacious veranda to rooms of huge size. The grand piano was lost in the drawing-room; and all the big closets were as big as the bedrooms of a New York house. "Plenty of space to breathe," the Major told everybody. "Nothin' like the country when you begin to get on. Ugh! why did I wait so long?"

The lawn sloped down to a stone wall, and it was dotted with oaks and chestnuts. Beyond, on the eastern

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side of the house, was a grove that formed part of the property—a group of trees where the table had been set. Kegs of beer had been carried out by the servants, and a fireplace of fieldstone had been built by the clever cook. It was here that the pig would be roasted, the potatoes baked, and the oysters browned. The Major and his wife had gone to the grove for a final inspection of things before the first guests arrived, and were happy over the perfection of the improvised kitchen. They saw the Chinese lanterns swinging from cords that stretched from tree to tree; and his wife had fetched out some old candlesticks which had been in her family for three generations, to light the table, when darkness came. On one corner of the porch at the house the band would play, and the young folks could dance either indoors, later, or at the other end of the veranda, as they chose. There would be buckets of cocktails, literally, before the feast started.

"A true *Arcadian* party!" the Major said, looking at the woods in all their Autumn glory.

III

They had wandered away in groups, through the woods, down the long country roads; and when darkness fell a great horn blew, summoning them home.

The candles flickered in the night, the lanterns swayed above their heads, and the laughing negroes brought plates laden with food, and big flagons of beer and nut-brown ale. Mortie Langdon was married now, and he had brought his wife—a smiling girl with wondering brown eyes and very red lips, and masses of black hair framing her pretty face. He drank nothing at all—said he was finished with alcohol forever, and meant it. Elsie Triggert never wearied of watching their happiness—forlorn little Elsie who lived for others, whose joys were always vicarious.

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Shaftsbury had put vine-leaves in his hair, and Autumn foliage had been draped all over him. He rolled toward the table from the house, in the moonlight, his hulking shadow following him, a grotesque semblance of himself.

"Bacchus!" everyone cried, as he swayed toward them, a beaker of foaming ale in one hand. And then, before anyone could move, the poet had mounted a keg and with lifted arms was booming a poem of Francis Thompson's —the gorgeous "Corymbus for Autumn," beginning:

"Hearken my chant, 'tis
As a Bacchanti's,
A grape-spurt, a vine-splash, a tossed tress, flown vaunt 'tis!"

and on through those resonant stanzas that led up to

"And I had ended there:
But as a great wind blew all the stars to flare,"

and finally to the rich closing lines,

"The fiery-fruited vineyard of this night."

Then, as everyone applauded and cheered, he flung out one of the Odes of Hafiz, which Le Gallienne had just translated:

"You who against the cup admonish us,
Thus making war on a divine decree,
Your very visage, dour and dolorous,
The pain of your own abstinence declares:
You do without—but how reluctantly!

"Wine to the pure in heart is heart's delight,
Because its ruby no impression takes—
Saving the very face of sober truth.
As I talk on, as yonder candle bright,

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I cannot keep from smiling 'mid my tears
To think of all the music my tongue makes,
This wasted eloquence she never hears."

On and on he ambled through the silver lines, chanting and swaying, in love with his own voice, in love with the words of other poets, hypnotizing not only himself but those who listened to him. The stars had come out—cold, distant worlds peering down on this happy warm little planet, as though envious of the delight concentrated here, as though listening to the poet's deep voice, twinkling as they heard it.

The Gedley girls had been asked over; and Mrs. Moulton had told them to bring their harp—Miss Maria had learned to play it during the last year, and her sister had several new songs that seemed to call for a harp accompaniment. Out in the open air the Major's wife thought the music would be sweeter than anything she could imagine. Miss Maria had not told her so, but it had cost them three dollars to fetch the heavy instrument. They had had to hire a wagon to bring them from the other side of the Island. A violin you could tuck under your arm; even a 'cello was not too big to tote along in a trolley; but a harp—well, harps were not in every drawing-room, like pianos. You simply had to fetch it along, somehow, if you wanted to perform, and that was all there was to it. There were moments when Miss Susan wished she had never learned to play it; not only was the initial expense terrific, but she found that the upkeep was a constant drain on her none too plethoric purse. But when Mrs. Moulton urged her to bring the instrument, how could she refuse? There it stood now, among the trees, its golden frame shining through the darkness.

Nick was everywhere; H. S. superintended the ser-

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vants, as though he, instead of the Major, were giving the party. He wanted things to move on wheels well oiled, and as he was never happier than when giving orders, he reveled in the barbecue, and even danced an old square dance, calling out the figures, directing everyone.

Old Englehardt, with his weary New Jersey wife, wondered what it all meant—this flaming evening, the like of which he had never experienced before. The quiet suburbs were all he ever knew; nothing ever happened to him save when H. S. called him down. He did not feel a part of this rapid pageant; and having Teutonic blood in his veins, the beer was a long time getting to his head. He could literally drink a keg of it, and so could his fat, phlegmatic spouse, before sinking into a state of lethargy. How was it that these poets and editors and artists got tipsy so soon? The Major was red of face even now; and Shaftsbury, after his recitations, had wandered away into the woods, to commune with the trees, telling everyone that they knew more than human beings, and were conscious of their own glowing beauty; for had not a dying oak told him so, and whispered that this would be its last Autumn in the world?

"I wish I was like that," old Englehardt said to his wife. "But beer only makes me drowsy, just like it did Pa and Grandpa."

"Hush! the Major's going to make a speech," Mrs. Englehardt said.

John Darrow heard the same old similes, the inevitable toasts proposed. How many times during the past few years had he listened to the dear old Major amble on in this way! And he began to think that his entertainments were given only as a peg on which to hang this dull oratory. He was glad when the hour came for them all to take the last boat home.

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Agnes Stanhurst had come over for the barbecue, as a matter of course. John always saw that she was asked to these "doings," as they laughingly called them. "You're one of us," he always said. "You do more for young writers than anyone else."

"And I hope to do even more, John. For it's really happened at last—my aunt's died, and left her money to me. Think of it!" she said to him tonight. "Isn't it wonderful?" She beamed; and Mortie, overhearing, proposed a toast to her good fortune, and they all shouted her name, and drank her health, and danced around her.

"I love you all!" Agnes said, embarrassed. "Just wait till my ship really comes in!"

Shaftsbury came out of the woods, after Beulah hallooed to him for a full hour. She found him sleeping beside the ancient oak tree, the vines fallen from his massive head—a tired Bacchus difficult to rouse.

As the whole crowd moved, after loud farewells, to the gate that would take them to the trolley, John looked back and saw the Gedley girls directing two of the negroes as they lifted their harp into a farm wagon. Then he remembered that no one had thought, during the whole evening, to ask them to play and sing.

> "Heard melodies are sweet; but those unheard
> Are sweeter,"

he consoled himself, as he boarded the car with the rest. But he wondered if the poor Gedley girls knew how Keats would have sustained them in their grievous disappointment. And he didn't know whether to smile or to weep.

IV

From the upper deck of the almost deserted boat, they could see the city shining far away. Sharply the lights

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glistened on the black velvet sky, like necklaces tossed casually aside by some weary queen. John Darrow never grew tired of this ride, night or day, when he came over to see the Major about some editorial question. When would he be able to put on paper all he felt about New York—all it had come to mean to him? Others must feel as he did. The city was a monster that tore you mercilessly apart. You loved it—and hated it. He never could say which emotion was the more dominant within him. The granite glory of the streets, the frenzy and terror—yes, and the peace of the place—kept beating at the gates of his brain; but he could not find time to chant of this mad town yet. Some day . . .

He had separated himself from the party, and found a secluded corner where he could be, as he so often wished to be now, alone. The stars above, and those stars below —how magical it was to be drifting toward them all! Other craft were creeping along the dark waters, moving like glowworms from shore to shore; and soon each boat would slip into its authentic niche. Everything found a haven, eventually—except his restless heart. He could not look at those lights which were Brooklyn, without remembering his days of fond youth with poor little Mary Gwynne. His talks with her—they all came back to him now. The lost garden of the world, which he had discovered with her—when would he find it once more? It could not be that he was to drift forever on the city's tides, a vagrant ship, with only his dreams and work for cargo. There must be a reason for his disappointments. Where was Mary now? Did she know, as he gazed at the trembling stars of the city, that he was thinking of her at this moment? If she was aware of him, why could she not make her presence known to him? But mortals have asked that question millions of times, and heard no whispered answer.

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"With a stein on the table,
And a good song ringing clear!"

He heard the voices of the others, in chorus, ringing out on the after-deck—Nick's high tenor, Shaftsbury's deep bass, Elsie Triggert's faltering soprano, and several others whom he could not recognize.

Were they as happy as they seemed? What of Beulah and Shaftsbury now? Everything was apparently all right with them. She could forgive him everlastingly. She could overlook that parade of peccadilloes. What a woman!

Suddenly he was conscious that the song had dwindled down—that one deep voice was missing; and before he knew it Martin stood at his side, almost sober now.

"Here you are! Been looking for you all over the damned boat," he said. "Why do you hide yourself away like this, John?"

He pulled up one of the little folding camp-stools, and put his arm around John's shoulder.

"Bully party!" he growled. "God! those lanterns—and now these stars! What a world we live in, John! I wish we could be as peaceful as the heavens."

It was when he was this way that John liked him—the fine spiritual quality in the man emerging from the mere sensualist; his love of the beautiful unable to be held in any longer.

"We can be almost anything we wish, can't we, Martin?" he said.

The poet was very still. He was looking far off at the city, lost in the emotions that were surging within him.

"Listen, John," he said at last, as though the other had not spoken. "I want to tell you something."

"Yes?"

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Silence again. They could hear the water rising and falling about them, and the occasional blowing of a distant whistle, as they plowed through the darkness.

"I regret lots of things with you—you've been my best friend—my very best friend; and I'm a rotter. If I hurt you with Connie Muir . . ."

"Don't speak of that," John said. "It's past and gone, Martin. We said we'd never bring her up again."

"But I've got to say this, old friend." He drew him yet closer to him. "I love only Beulah—you know that; but I just can't help—the other women. It's my curse, you see—the payment the gods exact of me for my happiness in my art. We all have to suffer somehow. I never loved Connie—you know that; and—there was nothing really wrong. I was writing a play for her, and she's taken it, and it's going on in London in a month. I wanted you to know, first of all."

He never knew how he hurt him. John simply sat in a daze, looking out at the water. So it was true! That is how Constance played with them all. She cared nothing for John, the man, nor for Martin Shaftsbury, the man. But she cared for them as writers, and pitted them secretly against each other. Whichever came out on top as an artist —that was what she was interested in. He saw it all now. It was just a game; and if, in the playing of it, she had found it rather necessary to become engaged to one of them—the only one to whom she could become engaged—that was part of it. She had no scruples.

John rose, and leaned over the railing. Martin was at his side in an instant.

"I hope—I hope you have a great success," John Darrow said.

"Thanks, old man. I knew you'd feel that way."

The boat swirled with the tide. The city was almost magically upon them, a high honeycomb of light and

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beauty. Their boat had found its haven. Behind him John heard one farewell strain:

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine!"

He was glad of the concealing darkness—the long shadow of the wharf, the restless movement of many feet, and the fact that Martin left him to go uptown with the others. He had made up his mind to take a Third Avenue elevated train, for he knew all the rest would probably go up on the West Side in order to be together.

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CHAPTER IX

I

NEVER had there been such a wet April. Day after day the skies were low and forbidding, and all the glamour of a New York Spring was lost behind curtains of incessant rain. Yet in a way, John was not sorry. Fewer people came into the office during weather like this, and he was able to concentrate on his work. He had found that callers ate up his time; and the casual visitor seldom brought anything of value to any editor.

He had made it a practice to come to the office on Saturday afternoons, for the *Arcadian* had caught on so well by this time that he was deluged with manuscripts from all over the country, and he found it hard to keep pace with his duties. Most of the clerks and stenographers were given a half holiday; but H. S. was ever-present, his keen eye upon every phase of the business, his panther-like tread a thing to be feared by underlings, but smiled upon by John.

Nick, too, was working hard—so hard that he frequently came into John's office around six o'clock, and asked him to dine with him nearby. Then one or the other, or both, would return to the office and pitch into the growing mail. It was through Nick, rather than H. S., that he kept in touch with the subscriptions; and the Major, who was keen, gave most of the credit for the success of his enterprise to the editorial department, and

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had the young editor over for many conferences, took his advice willingly on most things, lauded him to the rest of the staff, and sometimes made such a fuss over him that John was visibly embarrassed. He had won out on point after point. There was no comment now on long poems; and it was he who had forced Shaftsbury to write essays of surpassing beauty. Frequently he gave him merely a clever title; and it was astonishing with what rapidity and gusto Martin turned in his manuscripts. He found prose, of course, far more lucrative than verse; and he could not thank John enough for speeding his feet on this new road. Beulah blessed his name. She never wearied of her praise.

He felt the glow of the man, unseen, who pulls the strings of a marionette show. Small credit might be his; but he knew in his heart that all these writers were expressing themselves because he made it possible for them to do so, and he was content to sit back, silent, and watch the procession.

On a certain rainy Saturday afternoon toward the end of April, H. S., making his usual rounds, wormed his way into the editorial office, where John sat reading manuscripts.

"Rotten weather," was his greeting. "See you're at it, hard. Good business. I wish the subscriptions kept pace with these stories," nodding toward the huge pile of thick envelopes in baskets on John's desk.

"Have they fallen off?" asked Darrow, surprised.

"Somewhat. Can't account for it. The Major's always asking how the literary quality keeps up; but just the same we can't function in our department. I don't know what's the matter." He sat down, and stretched out his long legs, his hands going through the old motion that John disliked so much.

"Elsie Triggert's new drawing ought to have pulled 'em

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in," John smiled. "And that new catch line you invented, H. S., was a corker:

"'A dollar down, American or Canadian,
And for six months you'll read the new *Arcadian!*'

You're quite a poet, old man. Shaftsbury won't be in it, soon."

H. S. didn't know whether he was laughing at him or not; he never could make up his slow mind.

"Not so bad, when *you* say it; but somehow it hasn't caught on—especially in Canada, where we hoped for a big return. We've ploughed that territory—there ain't a furrow unturned, and yet——"

"Don't get discouraged. Things will perk up again. Wait and see. Look at the May number; and here's a dummy of June." He reached over and took out some proofs from his upper drawer. H. S. said: "Yes, I know. Good stuff—I've read every word of 'em. But the public ain't responding as it did. Say," he drew his chair a bit closer, and looked over his shoulder, to make sure that no one else was within hearing, "I'm getting a little suspicious of your friend in there." He nodded toward the subscription department.

"My friend? I thought he was particularly yours now. You seem to have appropriated him, H. S."

"Well, he was yours first. You introduced him to us." The "us" was significant, too.

"I introduced him to you, H. S., and to no one else. What's the matter? Nick's all right, I'm sure."

"Well, I'm *not* so sure, if you want to know the truth." H. S. scowled. His whole manner suddenly changed. He got up and closed the door tightly. An eavesdropper himself, he feared others who listened.

John wondered what he was going to say. This sud-

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den alteration of his attitude toward Nick—what could it mean? They had been intimate to a noticeable degree; everyone had spoken of their frequent luncheons together, their constant confabs—whispered talks at H. S.'s desk in the far office, or at Nick's in the other room. They seemed wellnigh inseparable. John had been glad of it. Anything that helped the *esprit de corps;* anything that made H. S. happier, would make for a better magazine. But in his heart he could never quite understand this David and Jonathan friendship. Still, he thought of his own liking for Nick. In spite of himself, the boy appealed to him in many ways. It was his gaiety that won him; the eternal boy in him. The memory of the past, those long bicycle rides, and most of all his kindness to him in two great crises.

"I *have* to tell you this," H. S. went on. Though the door was closed and they were obviously alone, his voice grew lower. "Your friend Nick——"

"Yours, too, mind you, H. S.!" John smiled again.

"Yes, mine too—after you had introduced him—to me." He was going to say "us" once more; but caught himself in time.

"Sudden friendships don't last, as a rule," John said.

"Oh, we're friendly still, only——"

"Out with it, H. S.!"

"Well, the campaign we're making is just as expensive as it ever was, and we've put out some good advertising—it's run up to fifteen thou'," H. S. stated. John thought if he ever said "thou'" again for "thousand" he'd shoot him. "And yet—the subscriptions have fallen off. How do you account for it?"

"That's your department," Darrow answered. "I'm sure I couldn't say offhand. What about Nick?"

H. S. hesitated again. He always hesitated when one wished him to hurry. He had stretched out his

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legs once more, and his fingertips touched and separated, as though he were in profound thought.

"He opens some of the mail," he said significantly, at last. "He's been getting here earlier and earlier each morning——"

"Earlier than you?" John interrupted, a smile on his lips.

"Yes; much," H. S. went on, without looking at him, but talking, apparently, to a gay figure on the rug. "I'm wondering——"

"Don't spare my feelings," John said. But he was worried. "You business men are much likelier to form emotional friendships than we editors and artists. That's true, H. S. I've often noticed it."

"Well, I certainly was fond of the boy," the business manager went on. "I know he lives a quiet life in Brooklyn with his widowed mother and sister; but —he has a friend in New York, too." He sat perfectly still as he said this, and then looked John straight in the eye, to see the effect of his bomb.

"A friend?" Darrow asked. "You mean—a girl?"

"I do." The words came out like two hammer blows.

"And you also think——"

"Yes."

"You mean, H. S., that you are serious in accusing Nick of—of misappropriating some of the money that comes in for subscriptions?"

There wasn't a second's pause. "I mean just that."

John Darrow rose. "This is mighty serious, you know. Shan't we call Nick in—now—and see if what you say is true?"

"Oh, we can't do that. I haven't got the goods on him—yet. Only, if you don't believe what I say, ask him why he sometimes stays at this address in West

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Forty-fourth street, overnight." He shoved out a card on which a certain number was written.

John held it in his hand; and he felt like a traitor to Nick Deeley. There he was out in the other office, bending over his work, and here they were, discussing him, one of them accusing him of theft and of leading a double life. Nick and the girls! Had his seemingly harmless escapades in Brooklyn in the old days led to this?

"Does Major Moulton know anything—have you told him about this?" John inquired. He was afraid he had become very pale. He turned and looked from the high window, where the city was draped in a veil of rain, and the endless roof-tops stretched away monotonously. Under one of those roofs Nick lived, occasionally. Not far away, too. And he knew nothing about it. He knew little of Nick these days, anyhow, except what the latter wished to tell him. How had H. S. discovered so much? He must have spied on him; for if Nick was touching those dollar bills as they rolled in, he never would have let Templeton know of his girl uptown.

"Not yet," H. S. said; but his tone implied that when the proper time came he would.

"We must find out if this is true," John said, in a low voice. He was speaking half to himself. "Is it very serious—this amount, I mean?"

"That I can't say. There is no way of knowing, just now."

"What makes you so sure of your facts?"

"General observation. When a department don't function, I begin to investigate. To be perfectly frank, I followed Nick one night."

John looked at him, and wondered how he could confess it.

"This is all a great shock to me, H. S., as you may guess. Please let me think things over, won't you?"

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H. S. got up. "You won't say a word—yet awhile?" he said. "It wouldn't do to have this leak out before I get all my evidence."

The word "evidence" sounded so much like a court-room that it terrified John. Where would this business lead? Nick—his friend, to be this kind! He heard H. S. go out and close the door behind him; then he went over to the window and looked down into the street. A man was caught in a gale of wind, and his umbrella turned inside out. Darrow laughed, nervously, and then wondered how he could smile, with Nick in such trouble. He wasn't going to believe anything until he found out for himself.

Darkness fell before he left that window; and the rain tapped incessantly with ghostly fingers on the pane.

II

On Sunday morning it was still drizzling. John had determined that he would walk up to the address H. S. had given him, and discover if such a situation as he had indicated, existed.

The row of houses was like all the rest in the vast city—brownstone fronts of three stories, with a stoop and a basement entrance. It was evidently a lodging place, with a rather untidy vestibule. And a most untidy housekeeper opened the door in answer to John's ring.

"First floor back," she said, when he asked for Mr. Deeley. He had expected that she would announce him; but she seemed unwilling to climb the stairs and return. "Go right on up," she suggested, as though this was the usual procedure in this house.

The hall was stuffy, the carpet on the stairway was worn, and John wondered how many feet had pressed this faded design through the changing years. He always wondered about such things. The pageant of life was

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always before him, and the fruitless errands of mortals caused him needless mental pain. Even the untidy housekeeper interested him, as she fled to her nether world. What she must know, and see, and hear!

In the darkness of the hall he hardly knew upon which door he should knock. But he took a chance with the one that must open into the larger room at the back. He heard someone moving, but there was no response to his summons. He rapped again, and a voice, which he recognized at once as Nick's, said, "Who is it?"

He did not reply; and in another moment the man on the other side of the door opened it about six inches, and peered into the dim hall. His hair was tousled, and he wore only a dressing-gown and slippers. A Sunday paper was clutched in one hand. For a second he could not recognize his visitor, and John was glad of this, for he had time to put his own hand on the door and push it farther open. He could see the entire room. A breakfast-table was set between the two windows, and the shades, because of the dark weather, had been pulled to the very top. A girl in a blue peignoir was in the act of pouring coffee, and her profile was clearly outlined against the window. John took her in swiftly. Where had he seen her before? He knew the face, that heavy dark hair, those slow gestures, the milk-white skin.

Suddenly it came to him, after all the years since he had seen her—the memory of a warm night on a beach, with the moon like a calcium, and a scene on the Bensonhurst sand. Yes, there was no doubt of it at all. She had changed but little. The girl was Kate Miller.

III

"Yes, I did it."

A half hour later, that is what Nick Deeley was telling John Darrow.

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"Why didn't you come to me?" John asked. "Everybody does," he added, cynically. But in the tenseness of the situation, Nick missed the cynicism. Kate had gone into the hallroom off the combination sitting-and-breakfast-room.

"I didn't dare," Nick said.

"I would have understood," his friend told him. "You know that, Nick. How could you take money from the *Arcadian*—after my introducing you to H. S.?"

Nick did not reply for a moment. He seemed to be in deep thought. Then,

"It isn't much—that I've taken," he said. "It was only about a month ago that I thought the thing out."

Darrow was relieved. The subscriptions were not coming in so heavily that great inroads could have been made within so short a period.

"How much will it come to, Nick?"

"Maybe—a thousand dollars would cover it.' He hung his head.

It seemed a tremendous sum to John; but he did not wince. He had just sent that amount to Ethel for repairs on the Cedar street house. Those repairs could have waited. This could not wait.

"Are you sure that is what it will come to? Be honest with me now, Nick. I deserve that, at least."

"Yes, I'm absolutely sure. I needed just that—for Kate."

"And does Kate know?"

"Of course not—until you came in. She thinks I'm making a pile of money. She'd hate me if she thought this. I wanted to get her into a better place, that's all."

"Wouldn't she have been satisfied here?" John wanted to know, looking around him. He could see that a woman's hand had hung the pictures; that only a woman could have placed the books on the table as they had been

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placed. The curtains had been made by Kate, he was certain.

"Yes, but it's a poor dump, as you know. That's why I wanted to get her out of it."

"And how long has this been going on?" John asked.

"You mean with Kate?"

"Exactly."

"A long time."

"How long, Nick?"

"Well, I've always been crazy about her. Maybe you remember that night——"

"Oh, yes, I remember it well," Darrow said. "Let's not rake up the past."

"I only wanted you to know that it was from then. It started that long ago."

"And has kept up ever since?"

"Off and on. There were long months when she wouldn't have anything to do with me. We don't live here together all the time. I only come here Saturdays. I'm supposed to be a traveling salesman in this house."

"Oh! And your traveling consists of going over to Brooklyn the rest of the week?"

"Yes."

"Where's Kate's sister—Pearl was her name, wasn't it?"

"She married an actor three years ago—travels with him all over the country. She's crazy about him."

"Does she know?"

"Of course not."

"Their mother died, didn't she?"

"Yes. Kate didn't really—you know—until then. She couldn't."

John saw, in this, a native delicacy in the girl. It was a hopeful sign, a symbol of spiritual integrity.

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"Why have you not married her?" John shot out the question brutally.

Nick was sitting at the disordered breakfast-table, and his back was to the light; but John was conscious of a change in his expression.

"I don't know," he finally answered. "We've drifted along this way so long, asking each other no questions——"

"A nice arrangement—for you," John said. "Did Kate ever suggest that you marry her?"

"Oh, no! She seemed perfectly happy—this way."

"Do you think she is?"

"She doesn't complain. She loves me, John."

"She must. Now, let me tell you something, Nick. For her sake—not for yours—I'm going to make good the damage you've done the *Arcadian*. I'll see that you're not put in jail. But you're to pay me back some day; and more important still, you're going to marry Kate Miller. Ask her to come in, won't you?"

He was very calm. He had to think rapidly. He knew now that Nick was the type of man who had to be told things swiftly—he must be given no time to consider. He saw Nick hesitate.

"Get her!" he ordered.

"But——"

"Do as I say, Nick. It's your only chance. You say she loves you—what I want to know is, do you love her?"

"Yes." There wasn't an instant's pause between the question and the answer. John never liked Nick better than at that moment.

"Kate!" Nick was at the door.

"Yes?" John was sure she had been sobbing in there.

"Won't you come out?"

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She was with them; and now John saw that she had been weeping.

"As soon as Nick can get a license, Kate," John found himself saying, "he's going to marry you."

"He doesn't have to," she replied, and looked adoringly at Nick.

"But I want to," her lover said. "I don't know why we haven't done it long ago." He put one arm about her.

"So far as H. S. is concerned," John went on, looking at Nick, "you have been married for a long time. I'm going to tell him that. We'll prevent a scandal. There will be no mess. No one but ourselves will ever know of this, do you understand? I'll even lie to your mother and sister, Nick, when the time comes for me to do it. I stood up with you a year ago, do you hear me? As a matter of fact, I want to stand up with you when you're ready. You've only to tell me the day and the hour."

Kate burst out crying.

"There's no need of that," John told her. "Please don't. Everything is going to be wonderful." He went over and put his hand in hers. "Kate, we're beginning again, all of us, aren't we?"

She could not speak for her happiness. She felt as if she had escaped, somehow, from a prison, into a new white world.

"I can't lose you, John," Nick was saying. "I can't thank you enough for what you've done. You're my only friend. I've been a rotter, if ever there was one. But you'll never regret this. I'm the kind that will get rich —you wait and see. I'll pay you back, with compound interest. Of course, I'll resign, and start fresh. Making money is a talent, like making poems. You'll see that I'm right. God! what you've done for me!"

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He pressed his hand as he had never pressed it before.

The debt bound them together. John Darrow had broken their chains; but in doing so he had forged others for himself.

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PART III

THE LENGTHENING CHAIN

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CHAPTER I

I

THE best thing about Agnes Stanhurst was that her sudden acquisition of wealth made not the slightest difference in her attitude toward her old friends. She had been poor too long not to realize the gnawing cruelty of poverty; and perhaps it was because she had waited so many years for her aunt to die that she ceased to look upon her final taking away as a terrible catastrophe. Moreover, she had planned just what she would do when she came into her inheritance. She wanted a whole house, with a big bay window, a dining-room of immense proportions, and a bathroom off every bedroom. She was one of the first to remove the hideous stoop from her dwelling, and to realize that a backyard can be made into a little island of beauty. She had shopped in her mind for a decade; to be able to go now in reality to any store on any avenue and purchase anything she desired, caused her to pinch herself to make sure she was not moving in a dream. She was still young enough to enjoy hugely this orgy of extravagance—she was but thirty-seven when Aunt Gertrude Holt providentially made her exit from this world—and she was wise enough always to take a companion with her when she tripped from store to store. It was great to blow Elsie Triggert to a luncheon at the Waldorf after a wild morning at Wanamaker's,

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and to see her face light up when she ordered a clerk to send her a half dozen pairs of silk stockings.

"You shouldn't spend your money on me," the tired Elsie would protest.

"And why not?" Agnes Stanhurst would retort. "What's money for except to give pleasure to just such people as us? And heaven knows I've waited long enough, Elsie, old dear," she would rattle on, happily. "And it's so much more fun to spend it on people like you, who just miss the lace and linen of life. Come on, now; we'll take a hansom and go up through the Park and have tea at the Casino."

That was Agnes every other day now; and her commodious house, built before impertinent trade had pushed its way into Murray Hill, and established itself there, was full of the things she had always longed for but had never been able to afford. She loved auctions, and haunted the rooms where they were held. She picked up a massive oak sideboard for almost nothing at all, and gave dinner-parties so that she could tell of her bargain, spending infinitely more in entertainment than she had saved through her lucky chance. She skipped over to Europe and brought home some tapestries and Louis Seize sofas and chairs. She found a chandelier in Italy and some dishes in Holland that "were too wonderful for words," she wrote Elsie with great originality and enthusiasm. "My dear, you *must* see them." But she had taste and a real feeling for color; and when her new home, made over, was completed, it was much admired, and people flocked to her teas—she made it a point to be at home every Friday afternoon.

They say that the most commonplace natures expand and radiate when they get into the White House. So Agnes Stanhurst took on a certain indefinable charm and distinction in her new surroundings. She was not con-

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scious of this—not in the least; and her Madison Avenue home, near Thirty-fifth street, became a pivot around which a delightful social life revolved. It had taken her two years to get the circle about her. It had grown weekly until now it reached out, like the fingers of the vast city, and touched innumerable people. Friends of her girlhood popped up; and a few who hadn't cared particularly about her dingy studio life in the old days found the new surroundings quite to their liking. A butler and two or three smart maids—Signa, neat and trim, was now her housekeeper—imparted a touch of grandeur to the quietly decorated drawing-room. Agnes gradually weeded out those who came only to be fed. She knew them through long experience and she was as clever in getting rid of people as in gathering them close to her heart. Sometimes she mixed her crowds too much, with stockbrokers and their ornate wives rubbing elbows with Shaftsbury and Beulah—there was the historic episode of Mortie Langdon hearing a Jewish gentleman asking the great poet how many poems he turned out in a year. "Do you write with a pen?" the merchant went on, unafraid and unabashed, when Martin had given him an answer that shocked him. "Certainly," said Martin Shaftsbury, rather delighting in the questions put to him by this dullard from another world. "Don't you think you could write faster if you used a typewriter?" the practical one suggested. "Eighteen poems a year ain't so much. I'll bet you could quadruple your output if you'd buy a machine."

He never appeared again at any of Agnes's "at homes." But Mortie contended that he was too priceless to lose, and said he was going to give parties in his honor, and ask William Butler Yeats and Le Gallienne to attend.

Even Philadelphia entered the charmed circle every now and then. Agnes had been born there, and Aunt

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Gertrude had died there; and often when she ran over now she would fetch back with her one or two old-time friends, putting them up for days in her big house.

She usually had one or two guests; and once, when the Gedley girls were down and out, unable to keep their old music pupils, she asked them over for a month. The whole third floor was put at their disposal, and they came and went as they desired. Agnes had the most beautiful gift of knowing how to let visitors alone. She made her own engagements, and let them make theirs, and that was all there was about it. She bought a foolish little runabout, and skidded here and there, taking her friends in it with her, even lending it to them for picnics over on the Palisades or jaunts to Long Island; but she still kept two horses, and preferred them.

Through long affiliations, Agnes knew the Philadelphia Comptons; and Janet, the young niece of her very oldest friend in the Quaker City, was visiting her during the late Spring, two years after she, Agnes, had settled down definitely to a happy luxury and was, indeed, taking it more or less for granted. She had forgotten, as one mercifully forgets all physical pain, those hand-to-mouth days on a shabby side street.

"I'll start you off with a tea," Agnes was saying at breakfast, looking across the little table in the extension she had built in the rear of the house. A chestnut tree shaded the bright little yard, which was really a garden; and Janet could hardly believe she was in New York when she looked out at the tiny pergola, the sundial and the vines which had been trained to conceal an ugly brick wall which belonged to a neighbor. Birds came and drank from a central fountain, and grass peeped up from between flagstones set in an irregular path that led to it from four directions. To begin the day looking out on this oasis was wonderful; and Agnes, who would rather

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give pleasure than receive it, noted Janet's starry gaze of delight.

"I'm in your hands," Janet said, smiling. She was twenty-two, and had had many teas given for her. She was facing the tall window now, and Agnes, watching her gray eyes and the creamlike quality of her skin, gave that inward sigh of the woman of advancing years when she looks upon youth flowering into its full glory. Janet, though she stared still at the chestnut tree and the fountain, was conscious of being observed. She was always conscious of being observed. People stared at her in trains and at theatres. From an exquisite mother she had come by right into her inheritance of beauty. All the Jays had been good to look upon—the men as well as the women of the family. They all had that brown, abundant, softly curling hair that never seemed to grow gray; those languid eyes and beautifully modeled faces. And then, as if Nature had said, "I have been very generous, but I'm going to outdo myself and add another gift," she had bestowed upon them the most lovely hands in the world, with fingers that tapered aristocratically, and a skin so fine that the delicate veins showed through. In her pink perfection, Janet this morning was like a bit of coral; and when she lowered her head, her long, thick lashes cast a little shadow on her cheeks.

"You are so lovely that it makes me ache," Agnes said to her.

Janet was used to that, too. But she would far rather hear it from men than from women. Dull creatures, women! She had no need of them, and she seldom felt drawn to them. Cousin Agnes, as she called her, was one of the few exceptions; and then, of couse, there was Winifred Gillespie, with whom she had gone to school, and whom she missed terribly from her Philadelphia life. For after Win had married Harry, she had come over

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and taken a place at Westbury. And Janet was now, on this visit, going to divide her time between Madison Avenue and the Long Island village. She was fed up on quiet Philly, as the girls always spoke of it, with its prim though pretty red-brick houses and its constant reminders of pious William Penn. Anything to get away for awhile, into the gay patter and beat of New York, and then rest up, if she needed it, amid the greenness and rolling beauty of Westbury.

"You'll want Harry and Winifred over," Agnes was saying; "and I'll get some amusing men for you. But even the best looking girls I know can't hold a candle to you, Janet; so you'll reign supreme on Friday."

She was used, also, to reigning supreme, so used to it that there was no answering thrill from her at the mention of it. Agnes, accustomed to the Compton ways, thought nothing of her silence. Hawkins passed the toast and asked if they would be in for luncheon, and then went quietly away to tell the cook that the servants would enjoy another day off.

"There are some literary celebrities I've always kept in with," Agnes rambled on, "and some artists who are not like those you've read about in the comic papers. I've known them for years, and I do hope you'll like them, Janet. But of course if you want just the Rutledges and Powells, and all that set, you shall have them by themselves. I don't care; but I'd rather you'd meet both crowds. It'll be far more jolly for you."

"And heaven knows I need to be jolly after a dull winter in Philadelphia," Janet said. "Ask them all, Cousin Agnes. I'll love them, I'm sure."

The brightness outside made her think of Westbury and the old rambling house that Winifred and Harry had bought. She was used to asking for things she wanted, so she suggested that it would be a fine day to run out

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there, by train or in the runabout. She hadn't seen Win for weeks; and though they might be cantering over the hills when they got there, they'd be sure to be back for luncheon; and it would do Cousin Agnes a lot of good to get away from the city for a day and stop her everlasting shopping. New Yorkers were always so busy—with nothing.

"If you call friends nothing, I'm afraid we'll disagree," laughed the goodnatured Agnes.

An hour later they were on their way, over the East Thirty-fourth street ferry. The river sparkled in the sunlight of a clean Spring day; and over them sailed vast battalions of clouds. The whole world sang for them.

II

The Gedley girls had long since discarded the harp and gone back to the good old reliable piano. They had found it most unsatisfactory to carry about with them a cumbersome instrument which no one appreciated. Moreover, Miss Susan's piercing voice sounded better with a piano accompaniment; although she had been loath to give up Gounod's "Ave Maria" which seemed to have been written for her and the harp. Nor did she without a struggle. Through many a dark and dismal Staten Island night she fought with herself; and a decision might never have been reached, though Maria was loud for a voluntary abandonment of the harp on the practical grounds of economy, had not a cruel anonymous letter reached her one morning and spoiled her breakfast. The writer informed her with blunt directness that she "was making a fool of herself," and hadn't she "better cover up her high notes with her sister's loud piano tunes, or else quit altogether?"

"It's someone who's jealous of my art," she weepingly told her tired sister; and she grieved not so much for herself as for the unknown writer of such an epistle.

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She couldn't imagine how anyone could be so mean. It was evidently one of their cruel neighbors, for they were forced to live in a poor neighborhood. "I like constructive criticism," she told Maria, "as you know, and I'm willing to take it. But this—" Again she wept, and was comforted by Maria. But that anonymous letter, unkind as it was, saved them many a dollar in cartage, and many a smothered laugh from others.

Today they were holding forth, as of old, at Mrs. Stanhurst's tea in Janet Compton's honor; for Agnes knew that if she did not ask them to perform, their feelings would be hurt beyond repair. She was able to bring in professional talent now, and frequently did so. Somehow it seemed more in keeping with the new surroundings; yet in her heart she preferred the old crowd with their spontaneous cavortings. Moreover, she slipped a check to the Gedley girls, every now and then, and always remembered them handsomely at Christmas.

"Do you remember how the candles used to drip on your coat?" Agnes whispered to Mortie Langdon this afternoon, looking toward the electric side brackets now installed in her beautiful drawing-room.

"Yes, Agnes, but wasn't it fun?"

"Nicer than this?"

"Maybe. We were all that much younger, and perhaps we only thought we were having a better time. I wonder if we really were?"

"A dinner of herbs is all right," Agnes said; "but for the life of me I can't find fault with a stalled ox. I love breakfast in bed when I want it there; and oh, Mortie, it *is* such fun to do nice things for the nice people you like!"

He beamed on her. "No one knows that better than I do," he told her. "Gosh, Agnes, but you've been good to Lottie and me. What a darned old messed-up town

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this is; but the right people always seem to stick together, even though new ones come along."

He was looking over at Janet as he spoke, and the Harry Gillespies; and Agnes saw his glance.

"You needn't be afraid, Mortie. I like new people a whole lot—though you can't call Janet a new person. They're stimulating, and keep me young. But you'll never catch me shaking any of the old gang even if the King of England should come along and try to break into our crowd!"

"You're a corker, Agnes—blessed if you're not," said the loyal Mortie. "But the Gedley girls are beginning. 'Sh!"

II

John Darrow had got into the habit of dropping in at Agnes Stanhurst's on Friday afternoons. It had become as much of a custom to meet there as to go to the office. One was always sure of seeing some of the old crowd; and in a changing city like New York, with its passion for new faces, it was a relief to find this refuge from the tumult, this island set in the city sea. Agnes's smile was like a beacon which lured them all to her door. She had but to wave her hand, and a host came.

He missed Nick among the guests. He had seen him only once since that memorable day when he attended his quiet wedding in the Little Church Around the Corner. H. S. was now running the Subscription Department, with old Engelhardt his pliable slave. John had arranged matters so that Nick himself seemed to make amends. Three months after he disappeared from New York he sent John a hundred dollars on account, with a letter so overwhelmingly contrite that John almost came to believe the whole incident was worth while. Then, a year later, he had burst in upon him, a serious young business man,

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and gave him half the balance that he owed him. It was the best thing in the world that he had got out of New York. Oh, you could laugh at Boston being a one-horse town—there wouldn't be any one-horse places soon, because there wouldn't be any horses. One-cylinder, maybe —yes, that would be the new slogan. But it was in staid old Boston, paradoxically enough, that he had found a live interest in the automobile business. Men were there who saw how the industry was bound to sweep the country; and he had got in on the ground floor, and he was going to be rich some day, as he had said. "It'll all come out just as I told you, John," he said to him in his rooms that evening. "Remember how we used to laugh at those old clumsy electric hansoms on Fifth Avenue? Well, they've gone, as I said they would; and the runabout has taken their place; and soon you'll see a bigger car—you've seen a few of them already. But the horse has gone to his pasture, and gasolene has come to stay. And then—flying machines. . . . Oh, don't laugh, John! Don't be a ninny like the rest!"

"I'm not laughing, Nick. Don't you suppose the editor of a popular magazine has got to feel the public pulse, too? Don't you suppose poets have vision? Tennyson tells of 'airy navies' in 'Locksley Hall.' I was only smiling at your enthusiasm. How's Kate?"

"Immense! Couldn't be better! John, what I owe you, in addition to that money! You'll never know! We've got the cutest little apartment; but I want to get Kate out in the suburbs. Don't mind commuting a bit. Boston's got New York stung a mile when it comes to suburbs. No better city that way. I've taken up golf, joined one of the clubs, and things are humming. When are you coming out to see us? We talk of you all the time. You've had my letters, I hope?"

"Yes; and I've answered all but the last one, Nick.

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I'm the busiest fellow in New York, I sometimes think. The way the magazine's grown would surprise you. H. S. is still stalking about, his wife's on the board—after a fashion. I have to keep her in her place—and H. S., too. I never have time to write—letters or poems, either."

"Too bad," Nick said; but there was that in his tone which told as plainly as words that he thought little of poems. What was the use fiddling over such trifles when Big Business called to young men? He couldn't understand the artistic temperament, content with spiritual rewards only. He pitied writers—except writers of advertising copy. "There's where the money is, boy," he often had said to John.

He had gone in with the Barrow Brothers Company; he was on the road to be the General Manager within a year or so. Sorry he had wasted so many months in the magazine business, and so many years down in Wall Street. A chap had to keep pace with the times. Already he had his eye on an agency in Chicago, and another in 'Frisco. In one year he had advanced as far again as he had in the four intervening between his Brooklyn life and his New York career. He made friends wherever he went; and his clothes were snappier than ever. He was always hurrying nowhere; couldn't sit still two minutes; and he had raced to New York in his own car—a Barrow six-passenger, with a long gray body and an engine that never made a sound. "Why, she just eats up the road," he cried. "Left her uptown, and if I was going to stay over, I'd take you out for a spin, John."

Darrow thought of Nick, and all that he stood for as he left the office and made his way to Madison Avenue. Letters had since come from his up-to-the-minute friend —letters filled with wild, boyish enthusiasm. The slate was clean now, except for a few hundred dollars, life

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had begun in deadly earnest for him once more, and the great game was being played for all it was worth. "I'll be on top yet," he had cried in one of his last lines. "You won't be ashamed of me any more. Just you wait and see."

Yes, they were the people who got ahead—men of Nick's stamp, who had no nerves, and plenty of nerve. They never gave a thought to their neighbors; and it really mattered little whom they married, or where they lived, so long as they made money and had plenty in the cupboard. They liked their women to be well dressed. They liked the best seats at the theatres, after a too-heavy dinner at some loud restaurant. They liked head-waiters to know them by name, as well as by sight; and they always got a corner table, passing triumphantly down the room, with that look of the successful man of affairs who has come to be such a part of our national consciousness. John was just beginning to realize that one had to be selfish if one was to shoot ahead. Yet what was "shooting ahead"? Wasn't it better to be a little behind in the gay procession, and keep one's dreams and ideals, than to go marching forward with a gaudy regiment of tin soldiers with epaulets and banners? To be seen here and there—everywhere—that was what most New Yorkers desired above rubies; and a haunting lyric from "Florodora" came to him, as he heard little Edna Wallace Hopper sing it only a few years back:

"I'm known everywhere
From Bayswater to Berkeley Square;
I've got a sort of air
That positively knocks you down!
There's nothing anywhere about
That people seem to care about
When I leave town,
When I leave town!"

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Well, there were ambitions and ambitions. He had but two: to find the right wife, and to write the books he longed to write. The pageant and show could pass him by, the price he had to pay was to join it and keep step, and listen forever to the noisy drums. Major Moulton had told him repeatedly that he should be getting married. A man reached thirty and his habits became fixed. Then look out! It wasn't easy to change after that. Too much freedom nowadays—no doubt about it. What was to happen to the race, if everybody dilly-dallied so? Why, in his day, a girl was an old maid if she didn't hitch up at twenty-two or -three; and by Jove, *he* had married and settled down at twenty-one, and never regretted it—no, sir*ee!* And when the first one died, he found another helpmate—Anna would have wanted him to do just that; in fact, she'd told him so, repeatedly, in their eighteen years of wedded bliss (the Major always used the dear old reliable phrases); and then when Charlotte took the journey from which no traveler returns, he had found Fanny, bless her little heart; and she'd been willin' to take him, though he was twenty-five years her senior, and he'd see to it that she never regretted the choice. Now what was he, John, lookin' forward to? A lonely old bachelor's life, in some leather-lined club, with servants around him who didn't give a hang for him? A cranky old literary man who would quarrel with the waiter at breakfast about his eggs and toast, take a stroll in the Park at eleven, and fall asleep on the club sofa at four, the much-to-be-pitied member whom the others secretly laughed at? Was *that* what he was to come to, in the end? Eh? Answer me, young man, answer me!

And what could he answer? He tried to laugh the Major off; but the Major was not to be laughed off. He had come to have a real and abiding affection for John Darrow, his hustling young editor; and he didn't intend

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to see him left behind in the matrimonial game. He had him out to meet friends of his and Fanny's. What was the matter with him, that he didn't succumb to these pretty Southern girls? "That's what I want to know, son—what's the matter with you? Don't go delvin' into the past all the time. Look ahead, and spruce up. Love's for everybody!"

The romantic, priceless old Major! He had more interest in life than anyone he knew; and though he consumed his liquor regularly—Fanny was too wise to deprive him of one drop of it—he was as brisk and alert as a schoolboy. "And it's her who keeps me so," he often told John, looking affectionately at his ever-present Fanny, and grunting with satisfaction as she stroked his head, or pushed back his heavy mane of silvery hair.

How much crowded into his thoughts as he walked up the quiet street that afternoon! It was no time at all until he reached Agnes's door; and when it was opened he heard Miss Susan's voice in the drawing-room, trilling gaily; and he could tell that Miss Maria was crossing her hands in the old way, the while her sister made it clear that something—he wasn't sure just what—whispered evermore of Tears, and Doubt—and Death!

IV

That was the afternoon—he would never forget it—when he made his unpleasant discovery.

One of the smart little maids had opened the door for him, and, seeing at a glance that the drawing-room, as usual, contained a plethora of people, he had passed down the hall and quietly entered the dining-room, which he felt sure would be empty. It was—at first glance. Even the servants were absent, waiting to be summoned, no doubt, when the singing should cease. The silver tea-urn shone like a great jewel, and the table was laden

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with refreshments—dainty sandwiches and cakes, almonds and candies; and in the centre was a huge bowl of flowers, which seemed to give a pure radiance to the room. The great bay window let in the late afternoon sun through shimmering curtains, and the polished floor gleamed and gave back reflections of the chairs Agnes was so proud of.

Near the window was a gauze screen; and as John stood near the table, listening to the voice in the next room, he was suddenly conscious of a shadow upon this screen—a woman's shadow. What was she doing there? He could see that she wore a hat, so it could not be one of the maids. Ever so faintly her outline was framed by the Japanese bamboo and he could not take his eyes from what he saw. She seemed to be moving rapidly, fussing with her handbag; and for a moment he felt that he should turn away, as perhaps it was some guest who had slipped in here to adjust her—well, her petticoat, no doubt; and the humor of being discovered himself as a spectator of her predicament came to him. But evidently whoever it was could not have been conscious of the fact that the screen was translucent.

As Miss Susan's voice soared to the sky, seeming literally to pierce the roof in its ecstasy—she seemed to think it necessary to sing louder, now that she received money for her songs—the person behind the screen peeped out, no doubt to make certain that the coast was clear. He saw that it was little Mrs. Cavendish, a friend of Agnes—an old-time society woman who had lately been in rather straightened circumstances, so everyone understood. One of the old New York Cavendishes, whose position had for generations been assured, even though their pocketbooks lacked that substantial fatness so comforting to us all. She saw John standing there by the table, and a curious look came over her face. It

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was the look of a naughty child, at first; then a flash of defiance swept across it; and underneath her antiquated bonnet—she still wore a bonnet, though hats had long since come in, even for women of her sixty-five years—her gray hair spread out like a frond. And now she stepped fully from behind the barrier.

"How do you do, Mr. Darrow?" she said, quite calmly. There was the slightest tremor in her voice, the merest shade of annoyance, too.

"Why, Mrs. Cavendish, I'm delighted to see you," he whispered back, not wishing his tones to be heard beyond the curtains separating this from the drawing-room.

Her frock had once been beautiful. It was of solid black velvet, trimmed with some sort of fur which he did not know the name of. It had grown rusty with overuse; and her gloves, he noted swiftly, were slightly soiled. The velvet bag which dangled from one wrist fell open as she came toward him, on mincing toes, and his eye saw that it contained—sandwiches! Then it was that he caught the extreme pallor of her cheeks, the almost frenzied look in her eyes; and it was grimly humorous that just as he spoke to her, there came from the other room a round of applause with Miss Maria's final slashing chord and Miss Susan's last triumphal note.

Mrs. Cavendish saw his eye fall on the bag, and she snapped it to, as she likewise snapped her lips.

"Well, you've caught me, John Darrow! What are you going to say about it?"

"I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Cavendish," he said, as though he had observed nothing.

"Oh, yes you do! You're just being kind."

He was far more embarrassed than she. It is curious how the oldest families always keep the upper hand. Had she deliberately planned to make him uneasy?

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"Kind—about what?"

"You know. I've been caught; and it's never happened before; and—I'm not afraid of you, John Darrow!" But her voice shook for the first time.

"There's no need to be afraid of anybody," he said.

"You won't talk—you won't tell about this?" she plucked his sleeve, as a child might have done.

"Hush! the others will be coming in here, I'm afraid," he warned her. "Of course I'll say nothing."

Miss Susan had begun another song. He was glad, for the only time in his life, to hear her voice.

"I might as well tell you, John Darrow." She pronounced his name swiftly, as one word, in the same way that Fanny always said "Majormoulton." "I'm—hungry, sometimes, and I steal sandwiches everywhere I go. Yes, I do!" She shot out the last three words with radical defiance. "And I—I'm not afraid of you or anyone else. So there!" Her eyes flashed, her bonnet bobbed, and he was fearful that she would claw his throat. She looked suddenly wild and worse than pale. She looked ill, and strangely older.

"What you do, Mrs. Cavendish, is not my business," Darrow said. "You may feel perfectly safe—oh, I'm sorry," he cried, for he saw her close her eyes, as if in pain, and he thought she was going to faint when she swayed toward him.

There was a decanter of sherry on the sideboard. He grabbed it, poured some rapidly in a tumbler and thrust it between her lips. With one arm he supported her, while he urged her to drink.

"There! Swallow it, and you'll feel better," he said. He managed to get some of the warm fluid between her compressed lips, and she opened her eyes, and automatically pushed her little torn handkerchief to her mouth. "Now you'll want a sandwich," he continued. "This

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sherry will make you tipsy"—he tried to smile—"on an empty stomach."

She smiled too, much to his relief. "Take me in there," she ordered, pointing to the curtains. "Nothing has happened, mind you, John Darrow. I never could live, if this were known!"

She stood erect now, and seemed to have full possession of herself. As they faced each other, he never had more veneration for her, never so completely understood that mysterious thing called "race" which can cope with any situation. What a Spartan she was!

"You're splendid, John Darrow. You must come and see me—very soon."

It was on that last word that the curtain moved, was pushed apart, and Agnes came into the room. Miss Susan had not quite finished her song.

"Oh!" she cried, seeing them.

"I felt faint," Mrs. Cavendish said, "and your young friend got me a little sherry. Shall we go in now?"

Hawkins was coming from the butler's pantry, with a tray, followed by one of the maids, and in an instant, polite gloved applause could again be heard, and people were pushing into the dining-room, from the larger drawing-room, chattering like sparrows. What a jam! What a medley!

"Do you know the guest of honor?" Mrs. Cavendish was asking John, as they stood stock still, unable to move when the floodgates were opened. The sherry had brought a flush to her cheeks, and made her quite herself again.

"No; where is she?" he answered.

"A distant cousin of mine, I think she is—the foolish end of the family who went over to Philadelphia when they thought New York was getting too big to live in!" she laughed. "Imagine the idiocy of that! . . . Ah!

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there she is! Janet, my dear, this is Mr. Darrow—Miss Compton."

It is stupid to meet like that, in a push, with everyone talking at once. Afterwards, when John thought of this first encounter, he always laughed; it had such elements of the ridiculous. For just as he put out his hand to Janet Compton, Hawkins stood between them, and, propelled by someone behind him, lifting a tray of punch-glasses high, separated them in the twinkling of an eye. John was conscious of a most beautiful face suddenly being veiled from his eager view; and he heard Hawkins's phlegmatic voice saying, "Pardon me, Miss," as he plunged toward the screen, and deftly lowered the tray and began dispensing the crimson fluid. Then he heard a lovely voice saying:

"He almost separated us—but not for keeps, I hope!"

"His punch may be strong, but it's not strong enough to keep us apart, is it?" he answered; and they both laughed.

Yet still they couldn't get together. The hulking form of Shaftsbury next intervened, and he greeted John loudly, and tried to slap him on the shoulder, but thank God couldn't; and then Beulah, totally unconscious, of course, of the recent introduction, was pressed against his waist, unable to budge. Janet could see him over the tiny woman's hat, and he caught the humor in her eyes, her appreciation of the situation. Their hands, by this time, formed an arch over Beulah's unsuspecting head, and he felt a little electric pressure from her fingers, and thrilled when it ran through him.

"Never mind," he said, "we'll be out of this soon. Can you make your way backwards to that door?"

"I'll try," she answered; and with his lifted hand, which he had no desire to extract from hers, he tried to aid her in getting from the crowded room. He never

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knew how it was accomplished; but by little proddings of those around them, they finally managed to reach the hall, and it wasn't but a second before they entered the now vacant drawing-room.

"It's selfish of me, but I'm going to keep you here, you guest of honor," he smiled, "for a little while, at least."

It was through her hands that he first knew her; and now he looked down on them, and saw how really beautiful they were. She noticed his glance.

"You like them, too?" she asked, to his complete surprise.

"Too?" he said.

"Yes; everyone seems to think them nice," she quickly replied. "I haven't a bit of false modesty—silly thing, false modesty. If your hands are lovely, and you know it, and the whole family has them, and they know it, what's wrong in speaking of them? They're a gift, showered on us by the angels, and we're awfully proud of them."

He was enchanted. Directness like this was so unknown in New York.

"I agree with you thoroughly," he said. "The trouble with most of us is that we're such cowards in saying what we feel."

"I never hesitate," Janet said. "I always go straight after anything I like—though it's hard, sometimes, in a crush like this."

"Was there anything here that you wanted to go straight after?" he inquired.

"Yes; *your* hands," she answered instantly. "They're nice, too. I don't know who you are, or what you do, but I guess you're artistic—a poet, maybe. Am I right? Or do you sell coal? It's hard to tell, these days."

"Suppose I told you I was only a dabbler in fancies,

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and that I earned my real living appreciating the worth in others?" he said.

"I wouldn't be surprised—nothing surprises me any more. That man—Shaftsbury, is that his name?—came nearer doing it than anyone. Only his eyes would tell you he's a poet. He looks as if he might come in to fix the gas meter. Only, a gas-meter man would comb his hair, wouldn't he? His boss would make him."

"After all," said John, "there's not so much difference between a gas-meter and just—meter. I wonder which is more necessary in a troubled world?"

She looked up at him. They had taken two chairs by the big front window, and he thought he had never seen such eyes and hair. There was a radiance about her, and a fragrance; and all he could think of was April and sunlight when he looked at her.

"So you think it's a troubled world?" she said. "Yet here we are, having a very nice party—at least I think so."

"Oh, I said 'troubled world' because sometimes it is—mostly, I imagine. I'm troubled now."

"Really? Then when are you ever happy?"

"In my work."

"Think of being able to say that!" she said; and there was a far-away look in her eyes, and both of them were utterly unconscious of the hum in the other room. It was as though they were on a distant island, and those voices were the surf—a sound that one had heard so often that he no longer noticed it. "I've never had anything to do—never."

"Think of being able to say *that!*" he repeated her words.

"I suppose you think it's awful," Janet Compton said. "But it's just the way life has treated me. It's not my fault. I wouldn't know how to work—how to do any-

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thing." She looked down at her hands; then she held them out. "Just think, they've never done one blessed thing that's worth while—unless you call playing the piano a little, worth while."

"Oh, I do!" he was swift to come to her rescue. "And how the keys must love it when your hands flutter over them!"

She liked that. "What a nice way of putting it. I'll wager your poetry is good. Say me some of it."

He laughed. "You won't believe me, but I never remember by heart a line I've written. And if I did, I don't think I could bring myself to recite it to anyone—not even to you. It would be like saying one's love letters aloud."

"But Mr. Shaftsbury recites *his* poetry—he gave us two or three lovely things before you came in."

"Ah! but he's not a poet any more—he's a playwright, a little ashamed of his popular success, and now trying to get back his past."

"I never heard of him until today," Janet said. Again her frankness was refreshing. "Things don't get to Philadelphia until long after they've been in New York."

"Oh, his play's never been here—yet. It's been playing in London for two years. The people drink up his lines, and he drinks up his royalties, so his wife says. But I shouldn't have told you that—Shaftsbury's a friend of mine."

"I'm glad you were human enough to say it," she answered. "I like to gossip about people. If you don't tell anybody anything, nobody tells you anything. And there you are—stranded on a dull coast. That's the reason I came over from Philadelphia. There were no surprises left for me."

"You like surprises?"

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"Who doesn't? *You* surprise me—a poet who doesn't know his own poems! What else do you do?"

He told her.

"Couldn't I read some manuscripts for you?" How often he had been asked that question.

"I'm afraid they'd bore you," he hedged. "Awful drivel. But maybe you could write something for me—with those worthless hands."

"No. Thank God I'm sensible enough to know that I couldn't be a writer," Janet said. "I can't even spell, and I don't know the difference between a dash and a comma. I hate letter-writing. I'm the most useless person in the world, and you ought to know it right off." She looked him straight in the eye.

"And why should I know it right off?" he smiled back at her.

"Because I think you rather like me; and I don't want to disappoint you—later."

Was ever a girl like this?

"How do you know I 'rather like you'?"

"Oh, I can tell. Who wouldn't? You're a poet. You have to like a pretty girl."

"Do you think you're a pretty girl?"

"Most assuredly. And I remember my prettinesses, even though you forget yours."

He was confounded but fascinated.

Her eyes never left him, and the late afternoon sunlight shone directly on her face. She came to his rescue.

"You can't say anything, can you? You've never met anyone so vain and foolish as I, have you, in all your life? Why shouldn't a girl who has been told since the cradle that she's lovely, know that she's lovely? How could she help it? Just as you've probably been told so often that you're nice, and companionable. Haven't you now?"

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"Maybe. Once in a while."

"Then what's wrong in concealing the knowledge from yourself? We hedge too much. We cover up everything in this silly old world. Why not be frank and open and natural? I'm so sick of pretense. I think I hate it worse than anything I know. You probably think I'm a spoiled child. Well, I am. I've had everything my own way since I can remember. What's gained by denying it? Maybe I was born to be spoiled, just as flowers are born to be looked at and enjoyed. People spoil you, because they like to. Well, if it gives them any pleasure, and you give them pleasure by letting yourself be spoiled, where's the harm?"

She wasn't smiling now. She was perfectly serious; and in the face of such honesty anyone would have felt confused. He began to wish that more people were like this Janet Compton—this slip of a girl who was thus appraising herself.

" 'Her simple doom was to be beautiful,' " he quoted.

"That's nice—but I don't quite like it. Is it yours?"

"No; Stephen Phillips."

"I've never heard of him. But it isn't a 'doom' to be beautiful—it's a dower. Poets are funny people, aren't they?"

"I suppose so," he laughed: "I'm not enough of one to know. But I admire critics—like you. Maybe you *could* read manuscripts, after all."

"Thank you. I'd go at it with an unprejudiced mind, anyhow. Maybe that's more than an editor could say."

"I'm not so sure. We're only human, though."

"I think *you* are. But I've always thought of an editor—when I've thought of him at all—as a cross old bear."

"Another surprise for you, then, in a day of surprises," he laughed.

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"Yes, and the nicest of them all," she replied quickly. "Thank heaven *you're* not a cross old bear!"

"Why do you thank heaven for that?"

This made her pause. Then,

"You're getting frank, too, aren't you? Well, since it's a day of frankness, it's because I—like you."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot. I need just that."

"Why? Don't people like you, as a rule?"

"One never knows."

"Come, now, be honest. You know perfectly well whether or not you're popular."

"Well, I do."

"And you are!" she snapped out. "Why not say so?"

They both laughed.

"If I'm popular with you, that's enough," he told her.

"How many times have you said that to a girl?"

"Never!—in just that way."

"Oh, you're improving! Soon you'll be entirely honest."

The hum of voices seemed to come nearer; and in a moment they were conscious of someone saying, "Where on earth have they gone?"

They looked up, and Agnes was at the door leading to the hall.

"Of all things!" she exclaimed, seeing them in the corner. "Don't you want any tea?"

They got up. They had completely forgotten there was such a thing as tea in the world.

"The tea is dropped, as in conversation," Janet said.

"Usually it's dropped, as in cup," Agnes replied. "But I'm glad you two found each other, in the crowd."

"The right people always find each other," Janet said, and looked unblushingly at John Darrow.

"I wonder," he said.

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And they were forced to become part of the floodgates that had poured into the dining-room.

"I can't have my guest of honor carried off like this, John—no, not even by you," their hostess was saying. "It isn't done."

"But it is, and it has been," Janet replied, in that adorable staccato manner.

They followed Agnes unwillingly. And Janet found it a new sensation to do what she was ordered to do. She would so much rather have talked there with John the rest of the day.

But he stayed to dinner, with only a few others—he was glad that old Mrs. Cavendish was one of them; and the next afternoon he found himself packing a bag preparatory to a week-end at Westbury with the Harry Gillespies. He didn't like them particularly, but he would have gone anywhere that Janet Compton asked him to go, and, too, they were friends of hers.

"There's only one May in the whole long year," she put it to him. "And there's an orchard behind their house that you'll love, Mr. Poet."

He wondered if he would bother to look at apple-blossoms over Sunday. He almost prayed for rain, so that they would have to stay indoors all the time.

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To have Agnes's tea develop into a week-end at the Farm, as he modestly called his handsome estate, was his conception of how things should be arranged, always. Party should follow party. The less let-up the better. Hours between them were but arid intervals. He liked to be amused, though he knew few amusing people. Agnes had opened for him the only door to cleverness he had found. This literary bunch was decidedly different from anything he and Win had dreamed of; and it would be great fun to exploit a few of them in Westbury. He would open champagne for Shaftsbury—yes, indeed, he would. There would be no stint, if he could only succeed in getting the poet to talk, and read. Such a man of genius had, of course, never been in his life before. It was as though he had suddenly discovered some strange flower in the heart of a jungle.

At the Friday evening dinner at Agnes's, he couldn't make up his mind about John Darrow. Here was a perfectly normal-looking young man, just a few years younger than himself, who had no pose, and yet got out that clever *Arcadian* and wrote poetry in the bargain. Harry imagined that all writers were "queer"; that they wore some insignia on their sleeves. Why, in that old panel picture of the six American men of letters which hung in his library, one saw mostly long hair and bushy beards. Shaftsbury must be the only genius in this New York crowd. Everyone else looked perfectly harmless and regular. Darrow, in fact, dressed as if the best tailor in town made his clothes, though he wasn't a bit foppish. It was all very confusing. Life had suddenly an added interest for him, and he was grateful to Agnes Stanhurst, and eager, for the first time in many years, to open some of his rarest vintages—do anything to cause poets and painters to come down to the Farm.

Beulah got to dread these out-of-town parties; for

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they gave Martin another chance to neglect his art. Since the success of his play in London he had done practically nothing with his poetry; and it was only because John Darrow sometimes literally sat on his doorstep (they had taken a handsome apartment in Riverside Drive) that he wrote anything at all. An essay was born after months of travail. Martin's royalties allowed him to loaf. Like most creative artists, he had thought that, once the burden of financial difficulties was lifted, he could settle down to produce only that which he wanted to do; but with the strongest incentive vanished, he seemed to grow lazy, if not sterile. Tomorrow would do as well as today to complete a poem; and so he postponed the epic he had been intending to write for years, drank gaily and avidly, not at the fountains of inspiration, but over mean or gilded bars, and made Beulah's life one long torment.

But Martin loved to visit the rich, and to be made a fuss over. He knew he would see his books in the library, placed conspicuously on the table. True, the leaves were not always cut; but one couldn't expect the world at large to read his esoteric poetry. When he was called upon to read from one of these volumes, he drew out his penknife and disconcertingly slipped it between the pages, causing his hostess to squirm. Afterwards he wrote an affectionate inscription upon the flyleaf, to atone for his rudeness. It was like those telegrams he sent after a quarrel—collect.

John Darrow's slender volume was now conspicuously on many library tables, also; and Shaftsbury, having written laudatory reviews of it, was genuinely happy over its appearance. Though he knew, as an astute critic, Darrow's limitations as an artist, he marveled that he had been able, in the odd moments away from his editorial desk, to write a book; and he also knew that if the young man could get more time, his poetry would grow in

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strength and beauty. For the poet needs time for contemplation; and though a silly world likens these hours of deliberate leisure to idleness and laziness, the man of imagination goes his way and refuses to listen to criticism.

II

"The sundial will be there," Harry was explaining, in his grandest manner, indicating a spot in the garden just beyond the formal bed of pansies.

They had all finished an elaborate luncheon, and now, with the pride of the lord of the manor, Harry had insisted on taking a few of his guests to view the grounds. He never wearied of showing visitors his place; and he exulted in seeing gardeners bending over his land, the while he pointed with a riding-crop to some beauty of the paths, some luxurious formation of the trees. He was too good-looking—one of those handsome, clean-cut young men to whom premature baldness is decidedly becoming. His firm skin was as smooth as a child's.

"I can't see why anybody wants to bother with a sundial," Shaftsbury remarked. "Time was made for slaves. Poets—and gentlemen—should have nothing to do with it."

Harry loved being linked in this fashion with the Great Man. He expanded at the implied compliment; and he looked at the Erskines and the Grants, to see if they had noticed Shaftsbury's delicate observation. Harry's set looked like characters in a smart comedy, both the men and women in their riding togs—in marked contrast to the poet, with his tousled head and ill-fitting tweeds. Darrow and Janet Compton had gone down to the pergola, through which the May sunlight dripped like so much gold; and old Mrs. Cavendish, having literally gorman-

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dized herself, went upstairs to rest, like an anaconda after an unexpected meal. Agnes Stanhurst had seen the gardens so often, that she and Winifred sat cozily chatting in the living-room; but through the open windows, where the soft Spring wind blew, they could hear the voices on the veranda.

"I was going to ask you to write an inscription for the dial," Harry was saying. "But if you feel that way——"

"Oh, I'll do that, in order to have something of mine live in this garden," Shaftsbury graciously replied. "Easy enough—even when you don't believe in the damn things."

They loved his casual "damns." "How quaint!" was the way Muriel Grant referred to them. And Tootie Erskine roared with laughter whenever Shaftsbury went down one of those dark little by-paths of conversation.

"If I had another liqueur I could write you something now," the poet said, oblivious of Tootie's screams of delight.

Beulah touched him on the arm. "Now, Martin, there's a long afternoon ahead of us," she cautioned.

"Oh, that's the easiest thing you know," Harry cried. "Meadows!" he called. Then, "Winifred," to his wife, through the window, "ring for Meadows and tell him to bring out some crême de menthe and chartreuse, won't you?"

Shaftsbury had noticed Tootie all during luncheon, and liked her gay appearance—a rosebud mouth set in a face unusually pale for one who took so much outdoor exercise; and he felt that if he had one more drink he would ask her to stroll off somewhere with him. He would say that he needed an inspiration girl in order to get the proper rhyme ringing in his head. He was adept at getting alone with women; and as Tootie herself had had

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more than she needed at luncheon, maybe she would not be averse to a walk with him in the apple orchard. Harry's cigars were wonderful; and these so-called society people weren't half bad. They looked so smart and clean, for one thing, and they hadn't brains enough to prove battledore-and-shuttlecock conversational companions. Indeed, it was a mental relief to get among them and it was far pleasanter to loaf here than on Riverside Drive. And God! what food they had, what service, what libraries—which they never entered, except to smoke! He liked it, and he liked Tootie in particular, and he could have cursed himself for never having learned to ride—he was too indolent to take up any form of violent exercise.

Esthetically, he liked the picture of Meadows coming through the open door with his silver tray of colored drinks. Life here had a certain background of opulence; and with his royalties rolling in, Martin had just enough taste of this sort of thing to want more of it. After all, it was for the rich to toady to artists, and he had had no compunction in taking all they had to offer of the beauty and grace and glamour of life. That was how things evened up in this world. A golden liqueur for a golden couplet! Cheap, at that. But they'd never get the couplet!

He liked the way they watched him sip his chartreuse, as if, poor blind fools, they could see the processes of his poetic mind. He called for another, the while he looked thoughtfully at the spot where the sundial was to be; and then he grabbed Tootie by her slender arm, and murmured that he must wander away with her so that the muse could work. "Bring a pad and pencil," he commanded; she smiled at his quaint manner, fled to obey him, and was flattered to be chosen as his companion. She didn't give a hang for apple orchards in full bloom,

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except as they set off her youthful charms; but it was in the nature of an adventure for one of her world to be sought out by a real poet; so she gladly went with him, tickled to death to be made so suddenly conspicuous.

"Are you writing another play?" Tootie asked him, as they went down a quiet path toward the orchard.

"Don't ask me about my stupid plays," Shaftsbury replied. "It's only my poetry that I give a damn about. Anyone can write a commercial play."

Tootie, who had never had a literary conversation in her life, didn't know what to answer. She had always thought it must be a frightful job to put words on paper, and she was amazed to learn, from a living author, that it was easy. She had lots of ideas, but she couldn't bear the thought of sitting at a desk and writing them out. Maybe he would collaborate with her, and she would surprise Jimmy, her husband, by showing him a big royalty check some day. What fun it would be! All their crowd would come to the opening, and she'd give a big supper party afterwards at Sherry's, and Mr. Belasco himself would be there, and the whole company, and she would have lots of flowers sent her, and it would be too enchanting for words. Why hadn't she thought of it before? But she hadn't known how simple it was. She ventured to say to the poet now:

"The third act would be great. We'd have the hunting set talking about the poor little fox, and then the heroine could come rushing in and——"

"Oh, you pretty women shouldn't think about plays. Leave that drivel to Broadway managers. All you need do is sit home—and be made love to." Shaftsbury said it with all his old-time emphasis. Tootie had never been talked to this way by a man, and—she rather liked it. Here was a thoroughly masculine person who knew more about the world than any male she had encountered. He

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seemed to understand women, in his crude way, to have them catalogued and fixed; and the fact that she really couldn't write a play, and knew it, but adored being made love to, convinced her that he was right. After all, it was something to have power over men, to be always on hand when needed, to be the object of their desperate flirtatious tendencies. She had had a lot of flirting to do in her young life; but one couldn't have enough; and it was such a bore to try to be intellectual. She was glad that Shaftsbury had driven her off the subject of playwriting. On her own ground, where she belonged, she could keep pace with him; and this physical being appealed to her, after the heavenly luncheon, as few men had done in a long time. She got so weary of the same old crowd—the Gillespies, Agnes Stanhurst, the Larry Ingalls, the Paul Grants, the Whites, the Latimers, Cassie Phillips, the Drakes, and the raft of young unmarried men who floated continuously about. It was a crowd that stuck valiantly together, and let in few outsiders; and the club dances and dinners were jolly good fun; but it was refreshing to see a new face now and then. She was forever being wound up in a mass of stock-ticker talk. You could get fed up on that sort of thing. Think of having a poet come into their group, and think of being singled out to accompany him on his first stroll! It was too wonderful.

"So you think we're just to be looked at, and—caressed?" Tootie said, archly, as they went into the ghostly orchard.

"Exactly," Shaftsbury answered. "All rot about this suffrage business. What do you want to mix up in politics for, anyhow? Nasty work, politics. Takes all the femininity out of you. What great women poets have there ever been? Sappho, and Mrs. Browning, maybe. In music, where have the women stood? Name one great

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composer if you can. In architecture, in sculpture, it's the same. No, woman should stay home and tend the babies, and—be loved, and worshipped."

Tootie was as unsure of herself here as she was in the literary field a moment ago. She hated to have to think. In all her twenty-six years she had never considered woman's place in the world. She merely knew that she had been born in a downy bed, had slept in one ever since, and expected to die in one, picturesquely enough, when the time came for her to leave this enchanting world. She liked men and had a great contempt for women; but she never analyzed her feelings and convictions. What was the use? Life was too short. She had never had a moment's serious conversation with anyone in her life. The pitter-patter of the country club in summer and the loud laughter of the drawing-room in winter were all she knew of this mortal existence. She looked rather vacantly at the poet now as he uttered his oracular statements, and managed to get out a feeble "Yes, I think you're right. Yes, I'm sure you are. . . . Haven't you thought of anything for the sundial yet?"

He gave her a knowing look. "You didn't think I really came down here to write, did you, little Tootie?"

He called her "Tootie" so soon! Quick, indeed! But she didn't intend to return the compliment—just yet. That would be unfeminine; and the poet didn't like unfeminine women.

"Why did you ask me to bring the pad and pencil, then?" she said.

"Can't you guess?" he inquired.

"Don't be foolish, Mr. Shaftsbury. Jimmy—my husband—wouldn't like this." But she knew that Jimmy wouldn't give a hang. Like most of the wives in her set, she wished that he would—and wouldn't.

Shaftsbury was instantly thrilled—just as she expected

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him to be. "Is that so?" he said. "Well, well, now, just what wouldn't he like?"

"Our walking off together this way," Tootie said.

"But he saw us come, and he said nothing."

"That's just it. He's most dangerous when he says nothing." She did not add that Jimmy never had said anything in his life.

"Then we'll go all the deeper into this orchard," Shaftsbury declared. "I like you, Tootie; and I hope you like me—a little."

She did not answer. She wished she hadn't taken quite so much claret at luncheon. The Gillespies always gave you too much to drink.

"Do you?" Shaftsbury repeated.

"I'm going back," Tootie suddenly said, and turned. But the poet grasped her arm.

"No," he said, "you're going to do nothing of the sort. I'll never write that couplet if you leave me."

She looked up at him. Jove! she was clean and pretty, as if two maids had just finished her off, and sent her forth, brilliantly polished. Someone had once told her that she looked like Fritzi Scheff; and it was true—that pert nose, that sudden lift of the saucy head. "I thought you weren't going to write it," Tootie said.

"I wasn't—for a time. One can't *dash off* even two lines, you little goose. They have to be led up to. You ought to know that." He laughed; and she saw that what he had had at luncheon, and afterwards, had gone to his head. She was glad they were in the orchard, and not indoors, though she was used to tipsy men. Jimmy himself indulged too much. They all did. But they worked it off in healthy exercise, and seemed none the worse for their more or less automatic sprees.

"Then let's go back," she suggested. She had shaken his hand from her arm, and turned again.

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"I've never had an inspiration girl act like this before," he said, very seriously.

"Oh, so you've had others before me!" she cried.

"Of course. How could I write without them?" His honesty disconcerted her. Tootie was not clever. After all, to play good verbal hand-ball there must be an alive adversary; and witty comebacks were not frequent at the dinners she attended.

"I suppose it must be interesting—knowing so many women," she finally said. "Doesn't your wife mind?"

"Perhaps. But she's always my final refuge."

Somehow the situation was losing its zest for Tootie. The mention of Beulah, brought in like a Presbyterian hymn, made her feel safe; yet a moment before, when she had tasted sweet danger, she was anxious for a haven. What did she want, anyhow? Life was a joke. One was furious if neglected, and equally furious if violently noticed.

"Let's make her your refuge now," Tootie said, and definitely started back to the house.

"No!" Shaftsbury cried out; and took hold of her again. "Tootie Erskine, you're not going to play with me. I'm crazy about you." Before she knew it, he had kissed her. She gave a scream, and Shaftsbury said, "Shut up, you little fool!" But even in the excitement he remembered that some white apple blossoms fell on her jet black hair, and made her look twice as lovely as before.

III

Janet was saying to John Darrow, as they sat in the pergola:

"I can't help it—I like them all. They're the only kind of people I've ever known."

"How curious it must be to have so much money,"

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John said, looking at the soft warm earth. "Doesn't it ever bore Harry and Winifred?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. But it would be a greater bore not to have it," Janet smiled. "Look at the difference in Agnes Stanhurst since she's come into her own."

"That's different. She wasn't born with a silver spoon in her mouth; and it's the contrast that makes life so wonderful to her now. And she does something with her money."

"But these good times we have—they are something, too," she protested.

"They are nothing. They simply fill in the gaps. Harry and Winifred"—they were the kind of people who insisted at once that you call them by their first names—"can't be happy."

"It depends upon what you mean by happiness. You must remember that they know nothing else but the kind of life they've always led."

"But why can't they get out of it?"

"Why should they? What else could they do, now?" She was in deadly earnest. "Not everyone is clever, you know."

"True enough. But——"

Janet interrupted him. "Why, they're trying to expand, when you come to think of it. The minute they met Mr. Shaftsbury—and you—they asked you right down here. They liked you. You must remember they haven't anything to give but hospitality. That's something, after all."

"Yes; it's a lot. And we ought to be grateful for this week-end in the Spring."

"I don't know—I may be wrong, but somehow I think that just being nice is a great deal in this world. If you give out that niceness, when it's your only asset, what more can you do? I like people who are generous

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with their homes, and their servants, and their gardens. These places are a good deal like churches to me—when you want them, here they are."

He thought what a godsend this visit must be, for instance, to Mrs. Cavendish, though of course he didn't say so. It would have strengthened her argument. He had a thought. "Are you staying down here long?"

"A week, maybe."

"I wish you'd get Winifred to ask Mrs. Cavendish to stay, too."

"Why?"

"She's not very well, I think. And she could write so much beter down here. I've asked her to do an article for the *Arcadian*."

"I didn't know she wrote," Janet said.

"Neither did I—until this morning. She says she can do me a paper on the old aristocracy in New York. It may be interesting."

"She has the background; she's always known that life. She remembers when the Waldorf was a farm, and when Fourteenth street was 'way uptown.'" She laughed.

"If she can get it on paper, it'll be fine," John said. He was certain of one thing: that she could write better on three meals a day than on those pitiful crumbs from others' tables.

They were silent then for a long time. The way the shadows from the vines fell on her hair made him a little dizzy. He had always loved thick, glowing hair, and the great helmet of beauty which covered her head caught flashes from the sun on this miraculous May afternoon. Her eyes, too—what depths they had, what clear pools of light they were; and again her hands seemed to him the most beautiful he had ever known. He told her so, as he had done the day before.

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"And they've never done a useful thing," she said, spreading them out until they looked like two butterflies, or a dove's wings; and as she rippled them above her shoulders, she gave a rippling laugh. He wondered if she really cared whether they had accomplished anything or not; and he found himself half wishing that they could be always gloriously idle, magnificently aloof from roughness and contamination. The dust of the world should never stain such hands. They were made to be folded in other, stronger hands, that was all.

It was while they were sitting there so still, with the clouds floating above their heads, that suddenly they heard a woman's scream from the direction of the orchard. John got to his feet.

"What was that?" he cried, and listened for a repetition of the sound. Janet too had risen from the bench.

"That was Tootie Erskine—hysterical again," she said. She didn't admire Tootie.

They left the pergola, and ran the little distance to the fragrant apple trees; and it was curious that John should have thought, in that moment, of his old phrase, "the candelabra of the Spring," which had been the means of bringing him to New York.

Janet, close behind him, caught a glimpse of Tootie's dainty form, and the great bulk of Shaftsbury holding her in one arm.

"I told you it was Tootie! What can be the matter?" she said.

They were close to the pair in another second or two.

It was perfectly obvious to John what had occurred. No one at the house had heard Tootie cry out, and perhaps she had guessd that there was little danger of a scandal. It was simply her old impulse to be dramatic. The poet had, of course, kissed her, or said something to her that he should not have done.

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"What's this?" Darrow wanted to know, as he and Janet came closer.

Shaftsbury looked up. He was touching one of the apple blossoms on Tootie's hair. He was utterly unconcerned over the arrival of the others.

"Nothing at all," Tootie gasped out, a little ashamed of herself for screaming, since she had not known of the proximity of John and Janet. "A bug fell on me. I never could bear the nasty things, you know," addressing herself to Janet. Yet the two girls read each other like open volumes; both were aware of the true state of things. It was a waste of time to practise such foolish deception.

"The bugs are very white this year, aren't they, Tootie?" Janet said, looking down at the apple blossom which Shaftsbury had let fall on the ground.

Tootie had loosened herself from the poet's grasp, and actually blushed. She was furious that anyone had come to her rescue. What an idiot she had been to scream.

"This one was yellow," Tootie answered; and didn't know how clever she had been.

They all got to the house somehow; but not before Tootie had managed to whisper to Janet:

"For heaven's sake don't say anything about this silly business to Jimmy."

"Would he care so very much, my dear?" Janet replied. "I saw him most attentive to Kitty Drake at luncheon. Who was it that said, 'Life in New York is a marry-go-round'? Oh, Tootie, don't play the ingenue with me."

They were all whisked over to the country club for tea soon after; and then stayed on to dinner. They danced, some of them, like mad people; and it was noticed how hilarious Tootie Erskine was all the evening. At midnight, the Drakes suggested a chafing-dish supper at their house, a mile down the moonlit road; and in the usual mix-up at such parties, John found himself separated from

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Janet Compton. She was much in demand, and because she was a guest, her health was proposed in repeated toasts; and when Harry Gillespie asked Shaftsbury about the couplet for his sundial, Tootie yelled out that she hadn't been the right inspiration, whereat there was loud denial, and laughing cries of "Down with poets!" and similar idiotic mirth.

Along toward two o'clock, they finally all went home; but not until promises had been made to come to the Ingalls' and the Latimers' on the following day—or, rather, on that day.

The hectic summer season was on; and John saw now that there would be no let-up for any of them, until he could escape on Monday morning by some early train. Did they do this all the time, he wondered. And he found that they did; and Janet was part of it—took to it naturally; and Harry Gillespie, in his sleek blondness, laughed wildly, for things were going after his own heart. The band had struck up in great shape, the dancers were on tiptoe; it was another hilarious week-end, and the light hours were rushing by. That new bunny hug—three cheers for it! and hurrah for syncopation and all the old mad ragtime tunes, and wasn't life wonderful, and weren't poets human, after all, and oh, but it was great to be crazy!

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CHAPTER III

I

Old Mrs. Cavendish had the knowledge, and the background; but she simply could not set down in orderly fashion the things she wished to say. When Darrow got her first manuscript, he felt an editorial despair that made him wonder if he had done wrong to arouse false hopes in the woman. She could talk, but she could not write. How was he to tell her so, when now, with his direct encouragement, she had counted upon a check? With a childish ignorance of the value of money, the poor aristocrat had already spent the sum she had been told the essay would fetch her; and the week down at the Farm had given her a new lease of life. She had crossed the Rubicon too definitely, of course, to take any active part in the foolish cavortings of the younger people; and in the cloistered grandeur of her room she had striven to put on paper the facts which she and John had talked over in detail. It was far more difficult than she had anticipated, and once or twice she had cried out to herself, over a lavish tray brought to her by Meadows, while the others frisked through the countryside, that she could not possibly go on. The hand unused to the pen finds it a struggle to put together even the simplest mosaic of words. She had no sense of values, and scattered sheets of worthless paper on the rug, as Mrs. Morgan used to do; and then telephoned John that he would have to see to the spelling and paragraphing and all those terrible

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things, for all she could get was the atmosphere he craved, and not another blessed thing.

There was nothing to do but to take her tangled manuscript home with him, and entirely re-write it, retaining as many of the Cavendish touches as he could, but invigorating the pages with his own personality whenever he was able to do so.

When Mrs. Cavendish saw the proofs, which of course he sent her, she was charmed, and honestly believed that through some miracle of the printing art, her manuscript had taken on this color and dignity. She never gave a thought to the editor in between. She could hardly wait for the next number of the *Arcadian,* and almost wept when Darrow had to tell her that the essay could not possibly appear for three months. "How annoying!" she said. "I've told all my friends to buy the June issue."

It was astonishing how she blossomed out with the first flurry of success. She was sure she could get some lecture engagements after her essay appeared; and although she was certain her father would turn in his grave at the thought of a Cavendish in print, one had to acknowledge that times changed, and what would have been wrong yesterday was right today. An author! It was too glorious; and the pink check she received promptly, caused her heart to skip a beat. If John Darrow wanted more material, she could reminisce indefinitely. She could have her niece come on from Boston to visit her, and they could go the rounds of Newport and Bar Harbor and Southampton together, to contrast the new society with the old ultra-conservative set in which she had been born and reared.

As a matter of fact, the first paper did make a stir, thanks to Darrow's deft editing and H. S.'s clever advertising—which John suggested. He knew the value of the Cavendish name; and he was more than willing to

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struggle night and day with any author to get a series that would sell the magazine. So he conceived the plan of sending a stenographer to Mrs. Cavendish on certain hours to free her from the physical strain of writing. Then he took her nondescript conversation and whipped it into shape. She was less self-conscious when she prattled along, and he achieved the end he desired. But she never got over the delusion that she did all the work. She blushed when her style was praised, and put on her new glory as she put on her new frocks and hats—she decided to abandon bonnets. And she looked ten years younger within the short space of six months. John arranged with the Major that she could have a small expense account with the magazine, for it was essential that she should flit here and there, gathering material. H. S. gloated whenever he wrote the name "Cavendish" in one of his advertisements. His middle-class Middle West heart warmed at the thought of the illustrious old name of the effete East; and he peeped from his office when the aristocratic skirts of Mrs. Cavendish swished through the *Arcadian* hallway, on the one or two occasions when it was necessary for her to see the editor in his office that summer.

II

The hot July and August burned themselves away, and the giant city smouldered like so much brass after the sun went down behind the Palisades. Wagon wheels sunk in the rubberlike asphalt, and the agate canyons of the streets shut out any faint breeze which might blow from the Harbor. It was as if great furnaces were smothered beneath the pavements, forever sending up their shafts of heat; and if it was like this on Fifth Avenue and Broadway, and in the sheltered side streets, one wondered

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how it must be in those sad districts of the poor, those narrow, baking alleys where whole families slept on roofs and fire-escapes—anywhere to avoid the stifling boxes which their landlords dared to call rooms. Yet there were hushed gardens of the world where the cool, clean moon sent down cascades of silver, quiet streams shaded by opulent willows; and whenever John Darrow could get out to the country he thought how terrible it was that so many millions could never escape from the city's vile trap, but must huddle in dens like cattle, praying for some moment of relief from this torrent of sun.

But though New York baked and languished, green fields and quiet roads called to the fortunate who could get away; and every Saturday saw crowded trains filled with workers eager to leave the town and its torrid waste of houses and cobblestones.

Down at Westbury, where Agnes Stanhurst and Janet Compton still remained, visiting the Gillespies, there was little thought of the aching city. Life was one long dream of delight on cool verandas; and before the heat of the day had scorched the grass, horses with their happy riders trotted through the scented lanes, and a wind from the Sound found its way to the hilltops where the rich had built their gleaming homes, like so many jewels tossed on the green cushion of the world. There were luncheons at the club, with iced melons, cold eggs, delicate green salads and frosted berries, and long drowsy afternoons of sheer idleness and content, with soft-footed servants to bring refreshing drinks when the real heat of the day settled down, even here.

Into this still magnificence and peace, Shaftsbury sank like a great flower on a pool. When the Gillespies had other guests he and Beulah were invited by the Drakes and the Latimers to stay on with them, indefinitely. He had a sense of guilt in not writing that couplet for Harry's

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cherished sundial; but even the slight effort required to produce a suitable rhyme proved too much for him. He smoked and drank incessantly, and read lazily all that blazing summer. Why work, when the royalties continued to roll in? And though Beulah roused him once in awhile to a realization of his neglected talent, he could not bring himself to take up his pen. She could forgive his faithlessness to her, but not to his Art. He knew this; and the knowledge was a sword in his hands. "I cannot work, unless I have fresh inspiration," he told her repeatedly. He found that Tootie Erskine did not inspire him, though she had long since forgiven him that kiss in the orchard. If she had continued to defy him, he would have found the pursuit of her enchanting exercise. But when he discovered that in this set little really mattered, he lost his zest for the game, and simply allowed the drowsy summer to lull him into a stupid languor.

These idle rich found him a picturesque figure on their lawns. They asked people down to meet the poet-playwright, though Shaftsbury writhed under the latter appellation, and insisted that he was a poet only, a poet first and last. He wished to go down to posterity as a maker of beautiful poems, and he always resented, secretly, his financial success, and wondered, in moments of penetrating self-analysis, if it had killed his great gift of song. He drank, as Beulah alone knew, to drown the dreadful thought. In the temporary oblivion of the bowl, he comforted himself that all was well with him, that he was merely going through a phase; but as the summer dwindled and his muse seemed agonizingly to have deserted him, he grew terrified, and talked long and earnestly with his soul.

John Darrow knew something of the spiritual crisis that Shaftsbury was going through, and, urged by Beulah to do so, was the first to advise him to escape from these

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easy-going days. They were the flowery links in a long chain, and it would have been so simple to snap them apart. Yet often the very ease with which we may accomplish something causes us to hesitate to make the slight effort. And it must never be forgotten that silken ribbons can ensnare us just as definitely as iron bands; and it is equally difficult to rid ourselves of them. The lethargy that had crept over Shaftsbury had not settled down upon him in a moment. It had come slowly but surely, and numbed him into indifference.

All during the weeks of that summer John was busy in town, re-writing the material that Mrs. Cavendish sent in to him from the fashionable places where she was visiting. She "got in" everywhere, and the prosperous *Arcadian* continued to send her generous checks for her expenses. When it came to the manuscripts themselves, a little different policy had to be followed. John could not conscientiously voucher them until they were in shape for publication; and with the riot of other pressing work upon him, he could not always engage immediately in the revising of an essay. He was therefore somewhat surprised when he learned that Mrs. Cavendish's niece Alicia Cavendish, came to the *Arcadian* office one stifling Saturday afternoon, and walked in upon H. S. Templeton sitting there alone. H. S. would have slept at the office if he could, he loved his work so much. He was miserable when he was absent from desks and cashier's cages, sheets of carbon paper and adding machines. Stationery was the breath of his nostrils; and for blotting pads and erasers he had a positive passion. He loved these things as John loved the smell of printers' ink on fresh proof-sheets. He loved the compact stock-room, filled with the paraphernalia of office work. He would stand at the door of it, as a captain stands before his troops, and note the long lines of material, the platoons of ink-wells, lead-

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pencils, envelopes and pads. Everything in order, ready to be called out in a jiffy.

Alicia was lovely to look upon, and it would have been obvious in any crowd that she was a thoroughbred. The way her head was set upon her shoulders spoke of birth and breeding, generations of blue-blooded ancestors; and after she had come out of a finishing school to join her aunt on this summer pilgrimage, a wealthy cousin had lavished several frocks upon her, given her the presents her aunt needed far more, and made her life in the smart circles she adorned as rosy as she could. In her false pride, Mrs. Cavendish had refused to appeal to these wealthy relatives; and they had never once thought of looking up Aunt Alicia, to find out how she fared. If her late husband's investments had petered out, they had no direct knowledge of the tragic fact; and if she was foolish enough to live in cramped quarters in New York when she might have reveled, with them, in the breezes of Newport, the fault was not theirs. When she knocked on their grilled doors, looking as chipper as of old, they had no time to ask what she had been doing during the past six months. They simply pushed back the bolt and let her in, and were as glad to see her as they were ever glad to see anyone, and that was all there was about it. They were mildly happy over her abandonment of bonnets, but did not even remark it.

H. S. had no idea who Alicia was, and she did not state her business. She merely said that she must see Mr. Darrow, and did the dark-haired manager know where he could be found? H. S. was sure he must be packing his bag preparatory to a week-end; and if the young lady would go to his chambers not far away, she would be pretty sure to catch him. The mysterious visitor thanked him hurriedly, and lost no time in following his suggestion. He saw her to the lift—as far as he would

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go with anyone from that office which was the love of his life.

But he kept wondering who she was. A Saturday afternoon in the heart of summer was no time for a business call. Besides, she gave no impression of business, or even of authorship. The women writers who came in from time to time never looked like this. Scraggly hair, dowdy clothes, pinched cheeks, some of them had. The artists were not much better, though one or two of the younger girls were far from unattractive.

H. S. was almost sorry now, busybody that he was, that he had not been more insistent as to the identity of the unexpected caller, and he thought how easy it would have been, and how delicate, to have taken her himself to the young editor's lodgings. He was aware that John knew all sorts of people in the great city, and he liked to check them up, as he put it in his mind. Interesting life, an editor's; buying stuff instead of selling it, making friends constantly, and only a few enemies. Well, everybody couldn't be so happy; but after all, his own days ran in pleasant places; and he had ambitions—yes, big ones. And as he thought of them, his eyes looked almost romantically at the blotting-pad that stretched its green length on his desk, and he pulled out the page proofs of the next issue, and began to read them. But he couldn't get his mind off that pretty visitor.

III

John heard a knock on his door. He had just put some unread manuscripts into his suit-case, to take along with him to Westbury—those moments in the train were too precious to lose—and was about to pick up his straw hat and be off to the station, when the vision stood before him.

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He had never seen Alicia Cavendish, so when he looked at this flower of a girl he did not know who she could be.

"Mr. Darrow?" she smiled, and half stepped into the book-lined room. She suffered no embarrassment at all, and his first thought was that she must be a canvasser for some encyclopedia—a well-bred young lady forced to work for her living in a most unpleasant way.

"Yes," he answered, "won't you come in?" And then he remembered that he had left but little margin for the catching of his train.

"I'm Miss Cavendish," the girl said. "I'm passing through the city, and my aunt wanted me to see you most importantly before I left for Newport tonight."

"Oh," Darrow said, and put down his hat at once, and offered her a chair. "I'm so happy to meet you, Miss Cavendish. But how on earth——"

"—did I beard you in your home?" she smiled, finishing his question for him. "I went to the office first, of course, and a very kind man told me I might find you here. So I came. Aunt Alice wanted—it's going to be awfully difficult to say it, Mr. Darrow. You've been so nice to her."

"Go right on," he made it easy for her. "And do get comfortable, Miss Cavendish. You must be tired, chasing me about this hot afternoon."

She fell into a chair—the big leather one that he liked best of all—and he noticed how immaculately she was dressed, what *savoir faire* she had, as though it were nothing at all to her that she was alone with a young man in his bachelor rooms.

"Aunt Alicia needs money, Mr. Darrow! There! I've got it out, and it's over, and I'm glad!" She looked up at him, to see the effect of her words, and the way her blonde head tilted reminded him of a saucy bird just after it has whistled a note or two.

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"Today? Right now?" Darrow asked, and also smiled.

"Aunt Alicia always needs everything right now," Miss Cavendish answered. "The whole family are that way. But you were leaving town, and I'm keeping you, and I'm so sorry."

"Oh, there are later trains," he was quick to relieve her. He found himself liking her staccato sentences which reminded him of Janet's way of speaking. She got them out between little gasps. "How much does your aunt need?"

"She wants a check—if you'd be so kind—for the last two articles. The expense money came, but—you know—it's so hard to explain." For the first time she seemed at sea, and her hands went out in a little helpless gesture.

"I couldn't go over to the office now," he said, looking at the clock. "H. S.," he half spoke, "could sign a check, but—see here, I'll give you my personal check, and I'll fix it up later with our cashier."

She saw him go to his desk and pull out his check-book, and sit down immediately with a pen in his hand.

"You're more than kind," she said. "My Aunt will be so glad." She was taking in the dark-oak-paneled room, and all that was in it. "Do you know, this is just the kind of place one would expect you to live, Mr. Darrow."

"Nice of you to put it that way," he smiled, still writing. "Poor diggings, but mine own. There!" He handed her the check. "A little irregular, Miss Cavendish, but the office won't mind."

"You're everything that Aunt Alicia said you were," his visitor remarked, as she took the bit of paper. Then, "Extravagant woman!" she laughed, tucking it into her bag.

"Can I drop you anywhere? I've got a cab at the door

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—there's my man now, ringing that it's down there." He grabbed up his hat and bag. "Sorry I'm in such an ungodly rush. Going to the Long Island Station."

"You could leave me at the Waldorf then, if you don't mind," she said. "My train doesn't go for three or four hours."

The baking street was deserted when they came out from the cool, dark house, and stepped into the hansom. Sun-smitten, it stretched before and behind them like a long brass rod. The horse was breathing hard, the driver was wiping his brow, and a lonely policeman stood under an awning at the corner, languidly swinging his club.

They did not see H. S., who had come way over here to buy a cigar in a little shop diagonally across from Darrow's lodgings. He was peering from the window, looking at the cab with a strange interest. When he went back to the office to finish the page proofs, his mind was not on the stories he waded through. He was thinking of young editors and their romantic notions; and then he rang up his wife and told her that he thought it would be a good day to go down to the Beach and eat a shore dinner. The city was impossible.

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CHAPTER IV

I

JOHN did not analyze his feelings much that summer. That he was going to Westbury continually seemed perfectly natural. It was not only the Gillespies who asked him down. The whole colony were generous with invitations to them all. Mortie Langdon and his wife were sure to be at this or that house-party, and Agnes Stanhurst ran up to town only now and then to do those bits of shopping which women always find necessary, no matter how elaborate their wardrobes may be.

The harmless parties of the blustering Major and the Agnes Stanhurst of what seemed now like a previous incarnation, were tame affairs in comparison with some that the Westbury crowd, who clung together in desperation, gave without ceasing.

It was nothing to see Tootie Erskine, after a gorgeous banquet on a moon-flooded summer evening, step into the little pool in front of her house, and lie gracefully afloat in draperies that were no more substantial than the vagrant clouds above her. The others would form a circle on the edge of the pool, and laugh with delight at Tootie's performance. Someone would always throw flowers upon her quiet form, and there would be whispers of "Poor, wonderful Ophelia!" and Shaftsbury would cry, "Mariamne!" and try to look like the mad Herod when he gazed upon the face of his dead Queen. Then, if it was Satur-

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day, they would all go over to the Drakes' for a pick-up supper—"pantry parties," they called these affairs—and chatter and scream and dance and sing until the pallid fingers of morning tapped on the pane. Mortie had done his imitation of DeWolf Hopper for the delectation of the crowd. They never wearied of it. "Oh, how that takes me back to the days of 'El Capitan!'" the men would roar, and beat time to the march tunes of Sousa, and wish that he'd write another operetta like that; they weren't nearly so good now, and wasn't it a pity that Mortie hadn't gone on the stage, he was so terribly funny, and maybe it wasn't too late yet, and a lot of 'em would back him if he made up his mind to do it should literature fail, and what a shame it was that he hid his talent in drawing-rooms when comedians not half so good got five hundred—yes, a thousand a week—year in and year out.

There were hunt breakfasts when Autumn came with a riot of gold and purple, and not until after Christmas would the country houses be closed. Then there was an exodus to town, for the Opera and the plays, with everlasting bridge parties, dinners and suppers, and the men talked of the stock market and the women of the newest fashions, a prattle that never wearied them.

"I don't see how they stand it," John Darrow was saying to Janet one evening toward the end of that first summer. "Have you really seen nothing but this kind of life?"

"Oh, the crowd over in Philadelphia are just as gay," she told him. "One does get a little tired of it all."

"'A *little* tired!'" he thought. And then for the first time he wondered why he came down here, and if he did, why he came again. It was all right to blame the sticky town for his eagerness to escape anywhere; but there were a dozen other spots he could have chosen. The Major had sent for him the previous week; and after their business

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talk he and Fanny and the gruff but kindly old boy had settled down to a day and evening of utter quiet and peace. He found himself chafing at the bit, longing to get away, saying to himself that he had lost the old habit of repose. Did New York "get" one like this? Those old evenings of solitude in his rooms—where had they gone, and what was this nervous spirit that was always hovering over him, as over the others he knew? What madness crept into the brain of those who lived in tremendous cities, and made them more avid of life? He despised noise and confusion; yet here he was a part of them; and it was not until he felt the serenity of that back road on Staten Island that he realized the incessant clamor of the town. He was like one who has worked all day in a building where heavy machinery shakes the walls, yet is unconscious of the uproar until the noon whistle blows and a sudden miraculous silence comes. Then he wonders how he could have stood it so long. Yet he finds himself missing the very thing he abominated, and is glad when the afternoon brings the steady trembling once more.

"But sometimes when the life I may not kill
Grinds, pitiless iron, on the screaming nerve,"

he would say to himself in such moments of fevered fretting, and knew that that was it: they all had screaming nerves, and they all came to think of the city as essential. It was, after awhile. How could one ever go back to delicate beginnings, to the lace-like borders of life, leaving the rich central pattern? Yet why was that design so fascinating? Why did it hold the eye and heart—yes, and the soul of any man who looked upon it?

He was in love again—and he did not know it. He thought that work alone could claim him; that only the pounding sea of the city engrossed him. But always, no

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matter how high the waves might toss and beat upon him, there were visions of a happy island through the mist. He thought that books were sufficient, now that two women had gone utterly out of his life. He thought that friends would fill each spiritual need; and always, in moments of loneliness, there was a pen for him to pick up. What a fool he had been to think that he needed anyone! He did not stop to ask why it was, then, that on Monday afternoons he would begin to count the days that would bring him back to Westbury. He pretended that it was the natural call of the out-of-doors for one pent in the hive of Manhattan.

"A little tired—is that all?" he said to her. They were riding horseback on a quiet road near Locust Valley. "Janet"—they had long since come to that—"when are you going back home?"

She looked at him, astonished, and drew up her horse, sharply.

"Do you want me to go back?" she asked.

"I don't know. But does this appeal to you?"

"What?" She took him literally, to lead him out.

"This life here—this nothing-at-all. Their capers."

" 'A little nonsense,' you know," she said.

"Yes, I know—'is relished by the wisest men.' Note the word 'wisest.' " He laughed, and so did she.

"They may not be wise, any of them," Janet said, loyally, "but they mean well." The horses moved forward, slowly, and a gentle breeze came from the Sound.

"So does the cook who burns your food. There are compliments that are purely negative—like saying a person is good to his mother. Who wouldn't be that? Like honesty, one takes such things for granted. But idiocy all the time—it rather palls, doesn't it? Don't you crave, after these week-ends, what I call my bread-and-milk nights?"

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"I don't know," she said, frankly. "I suppose I do want to be alone, just as you do; but you see, you always have something to fall back upon—your work, your writing. Do you realize that people like us haven't a single door we can open, to get away?"

"You don't honestly mean that?" John said. "I can't believe that you——"

"It's absolutely true, John. Not everyone has resources within himself. Why, Tootie Erskine told me that Jimmy can't bear to be alone, even when he shaves; calls to her to sit and talk to him while he puts on the lather in front of his mirror."

"Oh, ye gods!" Darrow cried. "And yet—yes, he *would* be like that, come to think of it. Terrible, isn't it?"

"In a way, I suppose it is. Yet people like that always seem to be able to find someone to help them out. And that's not so bad, is it?"

"I don't know. Suppose Tootie should die—or divorce him?"

"Why, he'd marry again in a jiffy."

"And in the meantime?"

"He'd drink a lot, and play poker with the men, ride more, in a crowd, go to musical comedies—amuse himself in any way just to keep from thinking."

John looked skeptical. "Do you suppose Jimmy ever thinks?"

"He's not so bad. He remembers to send Tootie flowers on their anniversaries, and when she makes a fool of herself, as she did last night, he forgets it and takes her in his arms as if nothing had happened." Janet said it all as though she had appraised every one of them through the days and years she had known them. "Harry's the same, you know. But he hasn't much imagination. After all, people don't marry an imagination."

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"What do they marry then, in God's name?" John inquired. "I don't believe that just being tied together is being married."

"Most people marry for companionship, deny it as you will. Few of us think ahead. If we can get over today, that's about as much as we can hope for. Harry's a gentleman, after all, and so is dear old Jimmy. They talk a lot of nonsense, but they're rather nice in the final summing up. They don't try to kiss a girl in an orchard, even when they've been drinking too much."

"Oh, come now, you can't tell me that they're as noble as all that! I'd like them better, maybe, if they were wickeder."

"There! You don't want them to be too bad, and you don't want them to be too good! You just have to take people as you find them, John. These friends of ours fit into their grooves, life runs on wheels for them, and they do know how to share what they have. I can't see that they're any worse than—us."

It was a very narrow road now, for equestrians only, and they had to ride single file. How well she looked on that dappled mare, and how she took every good thing in life for granted! Girls like Janet Compton—they knew nothing of the gray, dull existence of other girls, shut away in factories and offices, as men were shut away in prisons. How little she knew of the rough places of the world, of all that ghastly and difficult day-to-day living, she who had always been sheltered and cared for. She was meant to be sheltered and cared for. And it was curious how immune she was from the contamination of others. Her mother had died when she was a mere child, and her father, who had loved to travel in his youth, wandered about the world, taking this only daughter with him. Her girlhood had been spent in France and Italy and England; but when she finally came back to Phila-

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delphia, she fell in with the life there as though she had never left it. Until her father's death she lived quietly with him; and now that he was gone his younger sister, Agnes's friend, watched over her in a desultory way. The fact was that Janet needed no one to supervise her comings and goings. She had an independence due to her continental outlook on life; and if she wanted to pack up her bags and be off to visit Agnes Stanhurst—Cousin Agnes—she simply gave the order, and remained away as long as she chose. She liked Harry and Winifred Gillespie for the sake of the old days, and they were forever exchanging visits with all the gusto of idle people, never arriving on the train they had meant to take, disrupting each other's plans, but not caring in the least. There was a strange combination of helplessness and strength about Janet. John wondered if she felt really that she was part of this life she lived. Now, when she included herself as a being on the other side of the fence, he leaped at the chance to pin her down.

"Us, you say, Janet? Do you feel that we are—well, a little less like them?"

"Perhaps," she evaded. "You know how I adore Harry and Win, and I find it hard to discuss anyone when I'm under his roof. When you break bread, you know——"

"Oh, yes, and I love you for feeling that way," he was quick to tell her. "But we're not gossips and slanderers when we—" he smiled, but she turned on her horse and looked seriously at him.

"That's how we all begin to make excuses when we want to say something unpleasant, John."

He never liked her so well.

"You're absolutely right, Janet." He knew now that wealth and pleasure and peace of mind had not spoiled her. She was one of those who stuck, and stuck valiantly.

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There was a brief silence. Their horses loitered through the green and fragrant tunnel, their light tread the only sound they could hear. Then,

"Don't you think Shaftsbury is being spoiled here?" John said.

"If he is, it's no one's fault but his own," she replied. The path led to the larger highway now, and they were side by side once more.

"I'm not so sure," he said. "One has to look out for the artists of the world—they're so rare."

"But the worth while artist—surely he will save himself. I think there's a lot of rot about redemption and salvation. To save ourselves—that's all that's necessary. If Martin Shaftsbury wants to drift, that's his lookout, John. I'm not so sure that there isn't a great deal to be said on the side of the art of living as we wish to live."

"But if you're faithless to the best that's in you—what justification can there be for that?"

"None, I suppose. But how do we know what is the best in other people—or the worst?"

He was unable to reply for a moment. He thought of Nick Deeley, and poor Kate; and then, the very fact that he still thought of her as "poor Kate" caused him to wonder if she had not been just as well off when she was living with Nick in the old relation. After all, what did he know—what did anyone know—of their happiness after a change had come about? Would he himself have been happy with the best of Constance Muir—or the worst of her? And Mortie Langdon, drinking again, and still giving imitations of DeWolf Hopper—was that the best or the worst of him? If Mortie was happy doing these things didn't that make the worst the best? Himself, now: he drank more than was good for him on occasions. He never went wildly over the border; but no one could say that the worst of him did not bring out, later, the

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best of him. For sinking to the depths made him climb back to the stars. The world was like a great trap, and the people in it were victims, whirling madly about, trying to escape, trying to enjoy themselves in the perilous but inevitable situation in which they found themselves. They climbed over one another in their desperation to get somewhere—that was it: they were acrobats, and some had to stand on others' shoulders; and who could say which were the more important in the final tableau? It was like thinking of Infinity—one could go mad in the process. Was it not better just dumbly to accept what came along, irrespective of whether it hurt or not? One's passion for the safety of others was a noble sentiment, an august feeling to possess; but was it altogether necessary? One might as well try to save individual spears of grass in a prairie fire. Yet if one didn't make the effort, what about one's own growth and fulfilment? This girl whom he had come to care for through this strange summer had a serenity which he lacked; and there were moments when he envied her her incredible aloofness from the crowd. He knew her so little, when he came to think of it; yet he had seen her repeatedly during this season, and knew now that he would have to see her more. And yet there would be barriers—the barrier of her wealth, first of all; his inability to give her what she had been accustomed to, and a refusal on his part to go all the way with her in any life like this. A man of John Darrow's age and nature never sees a beautiful girl without thinking of her as a potential wife. The thought must come, sooner or later, however fleeting; and he wondered if women felt that way about the men who crossed their paths. Yes, they must. The sexes were much alike, alter all—the pursued and the pursuing, and basic formulas for the working out of their days.

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She looked at him now, after his long silence. "You haven't answered me, John," she said. "Have I bothered you at last—you old dear?"

"At last?" he cried, laughing. "You're always bothering me, if you only knew it! You're a witch, I think—like all the others."

"Then follow the witch-woman!" she shouted, and suddenly summoned her mare to a smart clip down the deserted roadway.

He dug his spurs into his own horse, and galloped after her; but she had gained several yards, and rushed faster and faster when she saw that he took her at her word. Through her blowing wonder of hair, she was laughing at him, for all her speed, and just before they reached the outer swinging gate that led to the Farm, she turned to see how close he was behind her.

That turn was fatal. Her mare, feeling the loosened rein, and quivering now with the excitement of the long run, wrenched free, and in doing so stumbled on a little rise of ground, and then went plunging into a ditch by the side of the road.

John saw Janet make one valiant effort. But the quick movement of her mount was too much for her. She fell with the horse, but not quite under her, and the animal began to kick the earth. Fortunately, Janet had rolled down into the small declivity, and lay curled grotesquely, her face hidden from him.

He thought for one blinding instant, that he could not stand it to see her thus. Her back might be broken—anything might have happened. She was so terribly still. Not a cry had escaped her.

He leaped from his horse, and rushed to her side. "Janet! Janet!" he cried, and turned her forlorn little body so that he would know the worst at once. Her eyes were closed, and she was white—so white—and her cheek

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was horribly bruised by the fall. He saw at once that she had fainted, and he took her in his arms, and stumbled toward the house. It was but a little way, and as he came up on the veranda, he could hear light laughter from the other side of it, and the clinking of ice in glasses, and Jimmy Erskine's voice in the middle of what was evidently a screamingly funny story. One of the servants saw him first, and cried out; and then he was conscious of many people around him, looking down, horrified, into Janet's quiet face.

"A doctor! Quick!" he commanded, and rushed into the drawing-room and tenderly put his burden on a couch.

And through the open window he distinctly heard Tootie saying to Mrs. Drake:

"Damn it all, I hope this doesn't break up my party for tonight! Whom could we get now in her place?" And in the moment that followed he knew that he hated Tootie Erskine, and loved Janet, lying there so still and helpless and beautiful.

II

He had asked Agnes Stanhurst to come to town one cool day in September and lunch with him in his rooms. A restaurant would be no place for them, with what he had to say to her. They must be in a place without music and distractions; and Andrew's wife could cook to perfection now. It would be cozy and intimate.

It was a month after Janet's accident. At first the doctor had feared a concussion, or at least a fracture of some sort; but when he discovered that his patient was only severely bruised and shocked, they were all intensely relieved. Her youth helped her toward recovery; but there were long days when she must be perfectly quiet;

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and the Gillespies saw to it that she was shut off in a wing of their rambling house, utterly undisturbed. Nurses came down, and all that velvet machinery which the rich can so easily command was set in motion to hasten Janet's complete release from the sick-room.

"You men—how comfortable you make yourselves!" Agnes said, rummaging about, as she always did when she came to John's lodgings. "Where did you pick up this old clock, John?"

"At an auction," he answered, putting the first chrysanthemums of the season on the little table near the window, while his man was downstairs getting the dishes. "I'm like you for those public sales, Agnes."

"And this?" Agnes asked, indicating an ancient print above his Swinburne.

"Oh, that came from an auction, too. You see, in a place like this, auctions speak louder than words!"

"I'm not so sure," she laughed back at him. "They say that bachelors in their apartments—well, one needn't go into details, John. But—don't you get lonesome sometimes?"

"The inevitable question of a woman visiting a man's rooms!" he laughed. "I'm surprised that you'd be so bromidic, Agnes."

"We women don't like to see you men so well fixed, living in single blessedness," she observed, bromidic still. "Honestly, it's a terrible thing for us; for every woman likes to feel that all men are dependent upon them. Confess, John, that you're not altogether happy here—by yourself."

"No, I'm not," he admitted. "And that's why I've asked you here today. There's something I want to say to you, you best of friends."

"For a moment, John, my old heart missed a beat!" she laughed. "I thought you were going to pro-

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pose to me! But do you think I've been blind this last month, seeing you and your tender ways with Janet?"

She went over to the table and put her arm about him, as a sister might have done.

"Oh, you comprehending Agnes!" he said. "Do you think she cares for me—just a little?"

She looked at him, pretending to be very serious and angry. "A man who can't find that out for himself, doesn't deserve to find it out," she said, in the voice of a solemn preacher. Then, in her natural tones, "I'm not joking, John, when I say that. Can't you see—can't you realize that Janet *does* care for you? She perks up when you come down to Westbury, and languishes when you're in town. It's awful. Now, get busy, and speed the day of your real happiness!" She patted his cheek, affectionately. "This accident was the grace o' God. We never find some things until we're about to lose them."

Andrew came in with a tray laden with dishes, placed the chairs, acted as if he did not see them, and disappeared again. The perfect servant, this Austrian Andrew, who lived with his wife obscurely but happily in the basement of the old house.

"You're right, Agnes. But there are barriers in my way."

"I know exactly what you're going to say," she told him, with all a woman's intuition. "You're going to speak of money. Because Janet has some of her own, you're afraid to ask her to be your wife. Nothing could be sillier."

He looked at her in amazement. If she had read his thoughts, she could not have done better. He could not speak.

"Why is it that money, which ought to be a beautiful thing is made so monstrous? It's an ogre in the path of everyone. But look what money's done for me!" She

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laughed. "My only regret is that I haven't a man to share it with me. Maybe some are in the offing—yes, even at my age, John, a woman doesn't quite give up hope!—afraid to come and ask me for my heart and hand! It's awful, this bugbear, this false feeling we all have about dear old filthy lucre. You men aren't a bit fearful of stealing a girl's beauty away from her—yes, lots of you do that, after you've won them! And you'll rob them of their youth and radiance, by your wretched behavior, but you become most respectable and saint-like when their money is involved. It would be far less dishonest to filch that, dear John, than their other assets which can never be returned!"

"Good Lord, Agnes, there's something in what you say."

"Of course there is. I'm a rich woman, and I speak with authority!" And again she laughed heartily. "Oh, the stupidity of mortals, when we could all be so happy if we wouldn't go about in circles. You've got something of your own, John—enough to support a wife on, at any rate. You've been through this before—forgive me for speaking of it. But don't, I beg of you, be a fool once more, and let the best of life slip by you. The time to grab a woman is when she's helpless, and doubly sentimental. Go to it!"

Their simple luncheon had been brought up, and now they were alone, with a bottle of Pontet Canet on the table and the rich sunlight filtering through the curtains, and the roar of the avenue like the far thunder of the sea.

"John Darrow," Agnes was saying a little later, "there's not much about you that I don't know and understand. You have a passion for setting others right—an altruism that amounts to an obsession, if you know what I mean. It can be carried too far. It's high time you helped yourself. You've got to be selfish, in a selfish world. What

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do you write that any other poet in the magazines doesn't write? What you need is to get off by yourself, with the woman you need, and dream your dreams, and write as you should. I don't know what. . . . Oh, John, I'm so inarticulate when it comes to talking literature; but I do have intuitions about people and things, and I just *know!*" She stretched out her arms, as if she would embrace him across the table, taking the whole world to her generous heart.

"You're doing now just what you've accused me of doing!" John smiled.

"But it's different with me. I have nothing to give myself—you have. What I give out is only temporal things: yours are spiritual, and they waste you away, these others, eating your brains and digging into your emotions. A string of them, always around you, engulfing you, smothering you. Break away from them, and get something out of your life—before it's too late."

"You think when a man passes thirty it's—too late?" He asked the question with just a shade of anxiety, and awaited her verdict as a prisoner in the dock awaits judgment.

"I wouldn't go so far as that," Agnes answered him with a smile. "But one passes a milestone at thirty, and gets into a certain habit of life from which it's hard to retreat." (That was how the Major always talked.) "I was married at nineteen, and had ten years of joy. I've always been glad of it. My husband was only a few years older than I. We moulded each other; and I tell you, John, it's fine, it's splendid, to miss someone you've loved deeply. Our twenties! Those are the years! Youth is a wonderful thing, John." She had the look, as she said it, of a woman who has known the rapture of life and is now content with her dreams.

He was silent. He wanted Agnes to go on and do the

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talking. He had the greatest veneration for her. He knew what she did for the children on the East Side, and for the Gedley girls and the rest who "just missed." She had made a will in favor of Elsie Triggert and others like her, having no close relatives to leave her money to.

"You don't know it, John, but Janet has always had her way. She's never seen anything yet that she wanted, that she didn't finally get." A little smile found its way to the corners of her mouth, as she toyed with her salad.

"Is there something now she's after?" John asked.

"I should say so! You're doomed, and don't know it."

"Yes, I do. Good Lord, Agnes, I have intuitions, too. A man knows when a girl likes him. There's something chemical goes through us all. But I wonder——"

"Don't wonder any more. Act. How much have you got? No, don't tell me—that was rude; but it's enough, I'm sure; and enough is as good as a feast. If you let money stand between you and this girl, money wins the battle—and you don't want that, do you?"

"No. I've saved a good deal, though I've spent a lot. But I do want to write, and I haven't the courage to break away from editorial work. If I marry a girl with money, people will say I did it to realize an old ambition."

Agnes looked at him across the table, a frown on her brow. "That doesn't sound like you, John Darrow—not a bit. 'What will people say?' Surely you don't care a rap about that, do you? If you love Janet—and I know you do—that's all there is to it. 'They say, what say they, let them say' should be your motto—a man like you."

It was nice to be given advice, instead of giving it. The editor was now the humble contributor, bringing his spiritual wares to market. There are moments when every man likes to sink back and hear a woman tell him what to do, no matter how strong he may be.

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"You know I don't care; yet one has to face oneself, Agnes. The hardest thing we have to face is our own souls, stark and bare before our eyes. Suppose I should find that——"

"No; it is unthinkable. Janet would know. Every woman knows when a man loves her for herself alone. Are you in doubt at all?"

"Not at all. Yet sometimes it is nobler to run away, isn't it?"

"Sometimes—yes; but not in this case. I don't think you ever loved Constance Muir. You thought you did; but you were in love with her art, her beauty, and she was in love, as you know now, with your potential talent as a playwright. Such a marriage could never have lasted. You were well out of it, John. You should bless whatever gods there be for your escape."

He could not bear to have Connie spoken of in that way. He had had his own misgivings, after all was over between them, but not while the flame lasted. But surely what he thought of her had no relation with the way he felt now about Janet. In the brief month since the accident, he had written six poems—the best of his career, the best of which he was capable. He had written nothing during all the time he had known Constance. And since he had known Janet the old urge of the long poem about the city was swelling within him. He could not dismiss it from his mind. He could not put it from him, and he counted the days until he could get some of his thoughts on paper. It was as though great tides pounded on a waiting shore, incessantly; as though some unexplained force beat at the gates of his soul. He lived only for the time when the dim hosts of expression should rush together, and those nebulous words should form into one vast army of attack.

They had finished now. "I do wonder, John, what the

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next few years hold for you," Agnes said, as they rose, and she looked over his littered desk where piles of manuscript lay. "Are you going on reading these," pointing to the typewritten sheets that symbolized the hopes of those unseen thousands who dreamed their dreams, wrote them down, and sent them forth to the world, "or are you going to sing your own songs?"

"I don't know," he said. "Sometimes I want to make the plunge, and then again—I hesitate. If I marry, I might find it necessary to stay on, the critic of other people's work."

"You, to hesitate, about anything, John Darrow! You should be ashamed of yourself! I don't know what's come over you. I wish you'd come back with me and commute between Westbury and New York, as you did for a while. Harry and Win would be only too glad to have you do so. In fact, they told me to ask you."

He knew what she meant. "Would someone else be glad, too, if I did?" he asked, smiling.

"Of course. Old friends like ourselves needn't beat about the bush, John. Come on. It's been delightful today, seeing you, but the country is heavenly, and—you know. Promise?"

"Yes," he said. "You're a good ally, Agnes. A man never had a better friend. Thanks a lot."

"I've got some shopping to do, as usual. Suppose you meet me on the Five-twenty-two? Is it a bargain?"

"If you say so. Nothing could be nicer."

III

There had been the briefest interval of social quiet after Janet's accident. It was like the technical mourning of royalty; and then Tootie Erskine could stand it no longer. A pall had settled over the dinner she had arranged the night of the upset, but along about ten

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o'clock the men used Janet's absence as another excuse to get jingled, and the gayety reached its height about then. But it was a false joy that rang through the room at the clubhouse. Everyone missed Janet, and her health was proposed in numerous toasts, and Shaftsbury wept in his cups. No one from the Farm went over, of course; and on the way home the crowd noted the unlighted house, and thought of the young and beautiful girl lying in the left wing, absolutely still, with nurses doing all they could to make her comfortable.

Janet was not able to see anyone for several days, the shock to her nervous system had been so great, and Tootie disliked the half-hearted parties that followed, just as a man hates to taper off in his smoking. She didn't see any reason for grieving because someone had fallen from a horse. Secretly she resented Janet's obvious popularity. The young men who had crowded about her, as though she were a Fluffy Ruffles, seemed despondent, and of course the Gillespies, Agnes Stanhurst and John Darrow were absent, too, from any of the festivities that were arranged the following week. A great hole had been made in the summer happenings; and Tootie, with no resources within herself, chafed at the bit. Things became so dull that Shaftsbury finally told Beulah he guessed they might as well get back to Riverside Drive; and on the promise that he would endeavor to work, she went up to town with him. Some of the younger members of the crowd had to go to the city, too; and thus the circle narrowed, until when mid-September came the little colony had dwindled to such an extent that Tootie gave up, and remembered Southampton, and rushed down there to complete her season. Tootie couldn't live without excitement, and Westbury had lost its flavor and spice, and all because of the illness of one lovely girl.

Of course John was delighted, on his second visit, to

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find things so serene. Janet was sitting up now; and the nasty bruise on her cheek had almost vanished. It was curious to see the difference in Harry and Winifred. With something so real as an invalid in the house, they had taken on a serious quality unsuspected before, and they couldn't do enough for Janet. Winifred envied the nurses their constant ministrations; she wanted to do everything herself for her friend; and she was glad when the day came which saw the dismissal of these hirelings, so that she could prove her devotion in offices of kindness. She would never forget that first hour when Janet was unconscious, and the terrible fear she experienced that the fall might be fatal. It had sobered her, as it had sobered Harry. As a matter of fact, nothing so serious had ever come into their lives. It was their first encounter with potential sorrow.

For John they had come to feel an honest attachment; and they were glad when he ran down every day—as glad as Janet seemed to be. In her delirium she had called out for him, but they had never told her this. But Agnes Stanhurst told John when she met him on the train that day. "If her subconscious self felt the need of you, and you are at all interested in her, have you any doubt now as to what it all means, John?" she asked him, in her direct way.

As he sat with Janet now on the veranda, and saw the slow September afternoon melt like a dream over the little hills that rose around the Farm, he could not help thinking of another whom he had lost so long ago. Were tragic accidents to pursue him all his days? Fate had stepped in once—twice—and robbed him of that which he desired. And almost again that same devastating Something had swooped down, close to him, and all but taken another. In a world of disillusion was he going to be afraid of that sinister Force which propels or retards

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us all, and bow his head before it? Janet had escaped. There must be some meaning in her escape. Why had she come out unscathed? There was a purpose in everything. He could not get his mind away from the memory of his emotions when he thought that she might have been dead, lying there in a little heap. It was as though something had vibrated in his brain, in his heart—yes, in his soul; and as if all three had crushed together, finding one central point. Then, later, instead of the confusion of mind he might have expected, he discovered calm and peace. Who was he to fight against such feelings? Why did he hold back?

"You are thinking of that day," she said to him. In her chaise-longue, covered over with a steamer rug, though the afternoon was warm, she had seemed to be looking off at the trees which revealed just a touch of the miser Autumn's gold. But she had been secretly studying John. His fine head, his sober countenance, his direct, clear gaze had appealed to her from the time she met him.

"Of course I am," he answered her. "It was the beginning of everything for me, Janet. You might as well know it now." He leaned over and took one of those hands that he admired so in both of his.

"And was it the end of everything, too?" she smiled. "Oh, you know what I mean!"

"The end of my self-possession—that's what you want to say," he laughed. "Yes, Janet, it was, except for a certain grim barrier."

"I know what you mean by that," she said. "But what goosies you men are—you who pretend to beat down barriers all the time. Yet when one tiny stone stands in your way where a woman is concerned, you let it get the better of you, and you never lift a finger to roll it from your path."

"Are we as stupid as that?" John asked.

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"Yes, most of you. And you are even stupider now. Can't you see what I've done, John?" Her hand pressed his, and he exulted in the warmth of it.

"What you've done?" he repeated, in some alarm.

"Why, yes. Don't you know yet that—it wasn't an accident?"

He drew back a bit, and thought she must be delirious again. She smiled at his expression of wonder.

"Yes, it's true, John dear. I purposely took that tumble, so that you would take one, too!" She paused, nervous when he said nothing. "Oh, you hate my slang—you hate me for everything now! What a fool I was to tell you!" She turned away, and there were tears in her wonderful eyes.

Still he could not speak. He looked off at the rolling land, at the sun like a great bronze coin dropping into the slot of the hills. Then,

"Janet! how blind I have been! Is it true that you did this—oh, God! I hope no one else knows!" He leaned over and kissed those hands he had come to love.

"No one else shall ever know. It's our secret, John, you blessed old stupid! It's too sacred to cry from the housetops."

"You mean that—you loved me enough for that?" he said, still in a daze, unable to believe what she said.

"Yes, I do. I knew I could fall so that I wouldn't be seriously hurt—I planned everything. You see, I've ridden all my life; it's almost second nature to me to be on a horse. But I got more than I bargained for. When I felt myself going out, I wondered if I would come back to you, ever, or go on—somewhere else." There was a little catch in her voice; and again he had that strange sense of the mysterious Something which had not let her sail on the unknown sea from which another in his life had never returned.

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There are moments when we cannot speak—those high, supreme moments when even Love is mute, and the voices of friends are lost in the comprehension of silence. He could only touch her hands, draw them close to his beating heart, and be glad of this great gift which had come to him.

They sat there until the last light faded in that magical sky. Then he whispered, "Janet!" And she answered, "John!"

A few moments later, she held his face between her hands, and whispered,

"You know how spoiled I am! I never saw anything yet that I wanted that I didn't get!"

"I'm going to spoil you forever," he said, "you blessed child!"

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CHAPTER V

I

It was a week later that John was summoned suddenly to Staten Island. The Major was ill, and Fanny telephoned wildly that he wanted to see his editor. Could he come at once? It was most important.

For a week now, H. S. and Mrs. H. S. had been constantly together in the office of the *Arcadian,* and John, unusually busy with the Cavendish manuscripts during the hours when he was at his desk, had had little time to notice their mysterious behavior. H. S.'s private sanctum, as he liked to call it, was now at the other end of the floor the magazine occupied, and there was a private entrance to it from the main hallway. John was not curious as to the business manager's comings and goings, though H. S. labored under the belief that everyone noted whatever he did. Like all people possessed of an inordinate curiosity, he took it for granted that the rest of the world was equally curious. Also, like all those who interfere in the affairs of others, he could be most secretive when it came to his own business. Consequently, John had no inkling of the momentous things going on in H. S.'s velvet-carpeted office. Moreover, he was so achingly happy now that he paid little heed to the grinding wheels of a workaday world. He knew they had to go on; but he was living in a circle of enchantment, and no one could have been more remote from his thoughts than H. S. Templeton.

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It was a glorious morning when he took the ferry, and John, with a dream in his heart, looked back on the splendid city as it melted away. Almost it seemed to him a symbol of his iron troubles. In the midst of them, they were hopelessly terrible; yet seen from romantic waters they faded swiftly, and finally vanished altogether.

The Major had not been well for a long time. With each visit, John was struck by his pallor; and when Fanny, at the doctor's suggestion, had to withhold some of his daily quota of whiskey, the old boy grunted and bellowed, and said that everyone was treatin' him cruelly, and he wasn't goin' to stand for it, and why didn't his own wife keep on spoilin' him, and why should he pay a doctor to torture him—the whole caboodle of 'em were no good anyhow—woof, woof! But his loud appeals fell on deaf ears. He simply could *not* have more than one teeny-weeny whiskey a day now, and there was no use in begging for it. "Lie back in your chair now, Majormoulton, and I'll read to you," Fanny always ended their arguments. And he succumbed, invariably, because he was too weak to resist. The truth was that he was getting old, and didn't realize that the crowding years were breaking him, as sooner or later they break us all. His early military training had stood him in good stead, and his regular nips of fine old Bourbon, far from hurting him, kept his blood warm and his cheeks glowing.

John was shocked today when he saw him, sitting in his library, the faithful Fanny holding one of his pale hands and reading to him. The grizzled head wobbled on the shoulders, and there were deep lines about the mouth.

"Hello, Major!" he cried, pretending that he did not notice how ill the old man looked. He strode across the enormous room, and took the hand that Fanny reluctantly dropped. "And how are *you*, Mrs. Moulton?"

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They were always glad to see him; he exuded health and vitality, a warmth from the outside world, with which the Major had had little contact during the past few months. But John noticed today that both of them seemed strangely different. It was not that there was a lack of cordiality in their reciprocal greetings. Fanny rose and took his hand in the old way, but she looked tired and somewhat disconcerted. It was nothing that he could name; but very difinitely he was aware of a change in their attitude toward him. They seemed embarrassed—yes, that was it—embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm much better," the Major said, but his voice sounded weaker than it ever had before. "And they're beastly to me—beastly, John. Wish you could see how they hold out on me! Miserable business, to deprive a sick man of his toddy!"

John smiled at Fanny. "A little egg-nog wouldn't hurt him, would it?" he said. And the Major, hearing the delectable word, all but leaped from his chair.

"Ah! there you've said it, John—egg-nog! Happy thought! Can't you get that scalawag of a doctor to let me have one, Fanny?" His face lighted up and his old eyes gleamed.

"'Sh, Majormoulton," she warned him. "Don't get excited, now."

Feebly his voice came back at her: "Well, if anything could make me excited, it would be egg-nog. Egg-nog!" he repeated the word, rolled it on his tongue, as a poor housewife might have smacked her lips over the recipes in a cook-book, though she hadn't anything in her larder. "Egg-nog! Um!"

Fanny made an excuse to get John aside. She said she wanted to show him her early-Autumn plants.

"He's too excited as it is," she told him. "We mustn't disobey the doctor's orders."

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"But there's nothing organically wrong with him, is there?" he inquired. "I don't see how one egg-nog, when he craves it so, would do him any harm."

"He's worse off than you imagine," she told him. "He's failing every day—I can see it. He insisted on seeing you, though—wouldn't rest until I'd telephoned." She paused. "John, be prepared for some bad news. It's been on our conscience ever since Majormoulton did it; but it's done now, and—" She turned away. She couldn't go on, somehow, and he hadn't the least idea what it was she meant. But he had been right. He had sensed something wrong.

"Let's go back to him," John said. "Don't worry."

"I wish he didn't have to tell you, but he must," Fanny said. She led the way back to the library.

"Bringin' me that egg-nog?" the Major wanted to know. "Might make it easier to tell John what I have to," he added.

"Sorry. Doctor's orders, and all that rot, you know," John smiled. "I'd bring you one in a minute if they'd be human and let me."

"Sit down, John," the Major said, feebly. "Fanny, hold my hand." He settled back amid his cushions, like an old monarch who is about to address his minister. "How shall I tell him, Fanny? Out with it, eh? That's the best way, always." He looked at the young editor from under his bushy brows. "Well, John, we're goin' to sell the *Arcadian*. There! I feel better. I've told him."

John Darrow was dazed. Somehow he had felt that what they wished to tell him was of little importance—magnified, in their eyes, because of the Major's condition.

"Sell it?" he got out, finally, after the tense silence that followed. "Who's going to buy it, Major, if I may ask?"

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"You tell him, Fanny."

"H. S.," Fanny said. "H. S. Templeton."

"Oh!" was all John uttered. "I see. Too bad. I loved the *Arcadian,* Major. We all built it up together."

"Yes," the old man said. "You did wonders, John. I only wish you might have kept on with your work—your best work—there. But H. S. felt—" His voice broke. "Oh, I suppose we were fools to take his word, but he came to me with stories."

John looked at the Major in amazement. Then he turned to Fanny. These people, who had been, he thought, his best friends—what did this mean?

"Stories?" the editor repeated. "Surely you—I can't make it out, Major."

"For God's sake, give me a whiskey-and-soda, Fanny! I can't talk unless I have it." His voice was thin and high now. She got up, and rang the bell for one of the servants.

"All right, Majormoulton. I'll break the rule this once—no more." And she held his hand again, doubly fortifying him.

"I don't quite understand," John said, in that difficult interval when they were waiting for the drink. If the Major's heart was weak, he was determined to guard him from excitement.

"Oh, I've been an old fool, I suppose," his employer went on, his head wobbling about. "But Fanny and I wanted to get out of active things, and just rest at home. And when H. S. came over and talked to us, I just told him he could have the magazine. Generous terms—very. Couldn't resist. I'd have sent for you, John, but H. S. said he'd told you, and that you were satisfied to stay on, with Mrs. H. S. as editor-in-chief. Fanny said today she didn't think that was so. You'd never do that. And that's why we asked you over. H. S. admitted over the

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telephone, after Fanny had talked to you, that he hadn't told you anything. Too bad, too bad!"

The drink came in, and Fanny passed it to the Major. John was glad of the interruption. When the servant had gone, he said:

"Yes, it is too bad, Major. But the stories—that's what interests me. Could you tell me a little something?"

The leonine head shook, as the drink went down in gulps. He seemed to be thinking; and for the first time, John felt that perhaps the Major's mind was not as clear as it had been. He looked at Fanny. She seemed engrossed only in her husband, and her face was a mask.

Before the old man could answer, they heard the sharp ting of the door-bell, and the servant came back to announce H. S. Templeton.

"He'd better not come in here," Fanny was quick to say. "Too exciting. Take him in the drawing-room, Nellie. I'll come over in a moment."

"If you don't mind, I'll go," John said. "You stay with the Major. There's nothing to worry about, sir," he added, turning to the old boy, and patting one of his hands. "Just believe in me. And to save you any embarrassment, Major, I resign here and now from the *Arcadian*. I'll send you a formal letter when I get back to the office. You've been misinformed, that's all. I'll make H. S. eat his words."

The Major's eyes filled with tears; and John went out of the room, and across the hall, with a firm step. He was going to have things out with H. S. Templeton, once and for all.

II

"You heard I was here, so came rushing over?" was the way John began, plunging into matters at once. "Well, I've seen the Major, and talked to him, and now

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I want to talk with you. What have you been saying about me?"

H. S. was completely taken aback. He knew by the sound of the other's voice that he was in no gentle mood. He had stood up when John came so unexpectedly into the room, and began nervously to press his fingers together, in the old way that the editor abominated. Only, there was less deliberation now.

"I have every right to come here when I please," H. S. said, looking at John from under his beetling brows. His slick black hair never looked slicker and blacker. "Perhaps more of a right than you know. I'm buying the *Arcadian,* and all that goes with it. You didn't know it, but in another twenty-four hours I'll be your employer." There was a sneer in his voice; and as John looked at him he wanted to knock him down. But he let him have his little moment, and then said:

"Oh, no, you're mistaken. I've just resigned. Major Moulton has told me of the proposed sale. I made up my mind in a jiffy that I couldn't work for you, H. S."

The business manager—the potential owner—was stunned. He tried not to show his discomfiture; but the lean fingers continued, more nervously than ever, to strike lightly together.

"I meant to tell you, John—yes, I did, but—well, you know how busy I am, always. I wanted you to stay—I was afraid we might lose you; but—well, I guess we can function without you."

"No doubt you can." Darrow smiled when he said it, thinking of Mrs. H. S. in his editorial chair. "And no doubt the Cavendish articles will continue to draw."

"Yes, they've boosted the circulation twenty-thou', they're so brilliantly written—the best thing you ever got for us."

"The best things I ever re-wrote for us, you mean,"

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John said. He was human enough to enjoy the mental picture of Mrs. H. S. struggling over the first draft of a Cavendish manuscript. "But let's get down to concrete things, H. S., to use one of your own favorite expressions. What have you been saying to the Major about me?"

The other turned, looking for the chair he had vacated, and finally got his long body adjusted in it. He crossed his legs and dangled one foot without ceasing, but his lips grew dry and he had to wet them, and apparently he found his handkerchief a thing of peculiar and sudden interest, for he kept drawing it out of his pocket and putting it back again, after he had fluted it several times.

"Oh, nothing that I wasn't justified in saying," he replied. "But I came down here, not to interview you, but the Major."

"I don't give a damn what you came for," said the other; "you're going to talk to me, here and now." He sat down opposite him, and looked straight into his eyes. "Come, out with it."

"Well, since you've brought this on yourself, you have only yourself to blame," H. S. stated. "You're too fond of the women, John Darrow, to please me as the new owner—and my wife. Do you get me?"

"No, I don't. Just what do you mean?" He was thoroughly angry, but he had himself under perfect control.

"Oh, you were always lunching out with pretty blondes —at Mouquin's, for instance; and last summer you received mighty nice-looking ones at your rooms. How about a certain Saturday afternoon in August, eh? Even Mrs. Stanhurst goes to your place for lunch every now and then, and——"

John rose. He saw the pitiful workings of this middle-class mind, and, furious though he was, he all but burst out laughing.

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"You poor devil," was all he said. "If I wanted to explain, how simple it would be. Get out of here, or I may throw you out, H. S. But before we separate, you've got to promise me that you'll undo these lies you've told the poor, helpless Major. Do you hear me?"

"They're not lies," H. S. protested. "And you know it. More than that, you've advanced money to the Cavendish woman—God knows why."

That was the final and inexcusable touch.

"You can't get away with this twaddle," John Darrow said to him. He went to the hall, and called to Fanny Moulton. She came at once.

"Look here, Mrs. Moulton," he said, "is the Major too ill to hear a confession from H. S.? It won't take him long."

"Oh, I don't know, John. The Major seems better, since he saw you, but I'm afraid of any excitement. Still——"

"Yes, the whiskey *has* helped," John read her mind. "Let's do it, Mrs. Moulton. We'll never have this chance again." He addressed H. S. "Come," he said. "You've got to wipe out what you've said to the Major."

H. S. got to his feet, and then to the door. John literally pushed him toward the library.

"This is an outrage," he kept mumbling.

"I agree with you," Darrow said.

It was curious how the whiskey had cheered the old Major. The color had come back to his cheeks, and he was like a child whose peevish wish has been gratified.

"Don't get excited, now, Majormoulton," Fanny said to him, taking his hand. "H. S. wants to tell you something. It won't take long." She had always liked John Darrow, and she saw, with her woman's intuition, that he had had a scene with the lank prospective purchaser of the

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magazine, and whatever their difference, that he was right and H. S. wrong.

"Good mornin', H. S.," the Major said. "Sit right down." He extended his free hand. Fanny scarcely ever let go of one of them.

"I just want to clear up one or two nasty points," John said, turning to the Major. "This foolish H. S. has got it into his head that I'm too fond of the women, and has doubtless told you so. Well, I am, Major—so fond of one woman that I am about to marry her."

Both the Major and his wife looked joyful. "Well, well!" they said together. Then, "Congratulations, John," cried the Major. "You know how I've always wanted this. Oh, God! what an awful old fool I've been!"

The face of H. S. Templeton was a study. A storm out of starlit skies could not have surprised him more. He could not speak.

"And H. S. has—well, just what have you said?" John went on, inexorably, turning to the dark man near him.

"Nothing much," he managed to get out.

"Oh, yes you have," Fanny put in. She was jubilant. And the Major, with his love of romance, far from being hurt by this interview, was improving every moment. Only, "What an old fool I've been, to believe these stories!" he kept murmuring. "It's worth another high-ball, ain't it, Fanny—John's engagement," he begged.

"Oh, you rascal, Majormoulton!" his wife said.

John said: "Major, he'll tell you now that everything he's said is a base libel. The girl I lunched so often with, once upon a time, was Constance Muir. And the charming girl who came to my rooms that August afternoon, if you all want to know, was Mrs. Cavendish's niece, getting my check in advance for an article for her aunt. As for Agnes Stanhurst—she's just a trump of a friend.

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But why should I go on? I'm talking for you, Major, and you, Mrs. Moulton. H. S., you've been a jackass, and I'm sorry for you, that's all." He looked pityingly at the business manager, who stood in confusion beside the big library table, still touching the balls of his fingers together.

"God! what an old fool I've been!" the Major whispered. "But it's not too late to make amends, is it, Fanny?" He always appealed to his wife in a crisis.

"No, it isn't," she was swift to say. "John Darrow, won't you stay on, if we don't sell?"

John smiled. "No, it's all working out for the best," he said. "It's fate, in a way. I've been playing the game too long as an editor. I've felt the need of getting away from the chain that's held me. It's lengthening now—it never quite unlooses itself from any of us. But it does give us a new pasture now and then. I want to go up to the hills, with her, and see what will happen to me. And it wouldn't be fair, would it, to do H. S. out of his magazine?" There was no sarcasm in his voice as he said it. He could heap coals of fire on his enemy's head—and then warm his hands at those coals.

H. S. was silent. But he looked as if he would give anything to unsay what he had once said. He stalked from the room; and when he went out, he cursed himself for an imbecile; and all the way back on the boat he envied John Darrow his peace of mind. He wondered what he meant by that lengthening chain. Queer people, these poets. They always talked in figures of speech, and they never got anywhere. Yet come to think of it, they did. They got away from the skyscrapers to the hills. But he guessed he himself was a skyscraper man. Yes, of course he was, he continued to think, as he entered an elevator that shot him up to the twelfth floor of his building.

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III

When John came in the next day to begin to close up his desk—that desk which he had grown so definitely to love—he couldn't help thinking of the joy he had known here, in this little office. Like a pageant the days passed before him; and old letters dropped from his hands—warm, friendly letters from this contributor or that. He had had a lot of fun, making the *Arcadian*. It was the breath of life to him; and there were moments when he felt that he had created something; that he had caused living things to emerge from the marble where they might have remained. There is always something tragic in any change. He recalled that even when he went away from South Portland avenue in the old days, he felt that he was tearing up some roots. But here his real life had centered. The last few vigorous years had given him both friends and enemies; and he remembered what Lavater had once written about the qualities of one's friends being those of one's enemies: cold friends, cold enemies; half friends, half enemies; fervid enemies, warm friends. Well, he had the latter, sure enough; and before him now was proof of it. For a letter from Nick Deeley had just been brought in by Peter—a letter full of the old fire and enthusiasm, beginning abruptly and characteristically, "John, it's a boy! And we've named him after you. Who else?" He could hear Nick speaking to him in those lines. "And here, old man, is that nasty little balance I've owed you so long. Come up and see your godson soon. He's worth a trip—nine and a quarter pounds—and thank God he looks like his mother!"

John was smiling at this last phrase, when Peter came in, announcing loudly, "Mrs. Shaftsbury, sir." And then, in a confidential whisper, "Looks like an essay this time, sir."

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But the moment John saw her face, he knew that she had been suffering again. A manuscript was in her hands, and she looked as if she had sat up all night typing it.

"One of his very best things, John," she told him. "Please read it soon, won't you? He writes that the check is to come to me."

"Writes? Where is he, Beulah?"

"Southampton. Oh, you know as well as I do what's happened, John. But he'll come back to me. It won't last—these flames never do. She's just a silly minx; but it's got so it hurts me, John. I wonder sometimes how long I'm going to be able to stand it."

"Getting worse, isn't he, Beulah? And I thought he'd been cured, somehow. The rotten rich did it. An artist can't go that pace. Too bad." He paused, and looked out of that window from which he had seen the great groaning city for so many years. How was he to tell Beulah that no longer could he pass on Martin's manuscripts? But he had to do it; and as briefly as he could, he told of the change of ownership of the magazine.

She took it calmly, as she took everything, this quiet little Beulah.

"Maybe it's all for the best, John. Oh, I wish you joy up there in the hills! And maybe Martin will come back now, and really work. He's got an idea for another play, and I'm hoping. . . . But you know him as well as anyone knows him. You've been so good to us, John." There was a quaver in her voice. "No one could manage him better than you."

"Except you, Beulah. You're a trump card. You'll fetch him around. Have no fear of that. There's a chain that's letting me loose for a while. The one around Martin may be pulling him in. Yes, I think that's it,

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Beulah—he's had too much liberty; and that's as bad as having too many restrictions."

"What a curious old world it is, John, isn't it?" She half smiled, for all that she was feeling. "Well, it's been good to know you, and have you for our friend; and we won't say good-bye. I wish you all the joy you need, and deserve."

She pressed his hand; and then,

"Let me kiss you, John—just a sisterly kiss."

That was Beulah. How wonderful life was, and how wonderful to have friends like her!

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CHAPTER VI

I

It was Spring on the top of the world. The low stone house on the mountain road was his at last. They had been in it for over a year, after a honeymoon in Bermuda that they wished might never end. They had lost the bleak New York winter, and now, with April singing on those hills that shut little Stockton in, they felt that the doors of life had indeed opened for them, and led them into a veritable paradise.

It was on a clean green morning that they stood together in the tower of their home, and looked down that valley where his whole boyhood had been spent. The slender river wound its long way beneath the willow-trees, by many a sunlit white farmhouse. Cows and sheep had been turned out to pasture, and the thick woods were bursting with leaves. The rich carpet that covered the earth seemed to have been spread magically in the night, after a light rain, and the ribbon roads over which he used to take his way on his wheel were twisting through the countryside, seeming now and then to hesitate, and then settling down to the solemn business of reaching the next village. They could hear the robins chirping, and above them floated frail argosies of silver clouds, like fairy shallops in a mighty sea of blue.

"Are you happy, Janet?" he was saying.

"So happy, John, that I ache sometimes," she answered him, and touched his hand again.

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" 'O love, how green the earth, how blue the sky,
And we are living, living, you and I,' "

he suddenly quoted; and then they stood very still once more, drinking in the pastoral beauty of this day, which seemed to be caught in a bubble blown for their delight alone.

"Strange, isn't it, dear," he said at last, "how I had to get away from that monstrous city before I could write a line about it! I see it all now, as in a dream, and I sometimes wonder if I could have been a part of it."

"What fools people are to lose all this," Janet answered, looking down at the world at their feet. "They could have it, for the asking; yet they rush to those cities of stone and bruise their poor wings on agate and marble. We were like that, but now. . . . Oh, John, isn't it wonderful here?"

"Yes. Do you really think you can be happy here—with me, my own?"

" 'Look in my face and see,' " she answered him. "The world is well lost, here."

He kissed her, and put his hand on her hair, and looked deep into those pools of wonder that she called her eyes.

But he knew that the city so far away, which he both loved and hated, would lure him back some day. One never could escape from that flame of life, that devastating power which lurks in the capitals of the world. The thrill of it would call him again—call them both—and they would be helpless to resist. Yet for a time. . . . Yes, it was good to be just here.

II

That night, as he sat smoking in the little library, seeing the stars of Stockton twinkling in the valley and

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the greater stars shining above, he heard Janet in the next room, busily typing what he had written on his poem of New York. And he thought of those beautiful hands which she called useless and how they had learned to do much for him.

The click-click-click went on; and suddenly he thought of another pair of diligent hands—a girl's, too—that had written out his earliest poems. He knew there was no disloyalty in this vagrant yet inevitable thought of Mary Gwynne; indeed, he had a strange, dreamlike fancy that those first hands also fluttered over the keys; and when he fully roused himself he knew that Janet would be the first person in the world to understand, if he should ever tell her what he was thinking in that hour of supreme joy.

THE END

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